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Pope in Manila Declares Rights Must Be Upheld

By Ab Tam

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Pope John Paul II, beginning a six-day tour of the Philippines with a pair of pointed messages, told the Philippine people today with President Ferdinand Marcos at his side that human rights violations have no justification even to meet exceptional security needs.

A short while later, in what appeared to be a calculated balancing of his remarks, the pope also warned militant clergymen here against becoming too involved in temporal affairs and urged them to avoid letting a zeal for social work lead them into disobeying their bishops.

The pontiff made no specific reference to the Philippines, Asia's only predominantly Roman Catholic nation. But, one month after Marcos lifted eight years of widely criticized martial law and against a background of civil rights activism by religious orders, his meaning was clear in both addresses and his choice of Manila as a forum appeared to be a deliberate gesture.

Vatican officials described the human rights comments as the strongest such appeal so far from the Polish-born pontiff.

"Even in exceptional situations that may at times arise, one can never justify any violation of the fundamental dignity of the human person or of the basic rights that safeguard this dignity," the pope said in a television address after a 40-minute private conversation with Marcus and his wife Imelda.

"Any apparent conflict between the exigencies of security and the citizens' basic rights must be resolved according to the fundamental principle -- upheld always by the church -- that social organization exists only for the service of man and for the protection of his dignity and that it cannot claim to serve the common good when human rights are not safeguarded."

In separate talks with men's and women's religious orders, Pope John Paul also told nuns they should respect orders from their ecclesiastical superiors -- alluding to nuns who have left their orders to live and work with the poor -- and cautioned priests to avoid veering away from spiritual concerns to concentrate too strongly on social work.

"You are priests and religious. You are not social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power. Let us not be under the illusion that we are serving the gospel if we dilute our charisma through an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems," he told a gathering in the 16th century Manila Cathedral.

Marcos sat impassively during the televised appeal for human rights. Observers noted that the pontiff went out of his way during the speech to couple his thinly disguised criticism with praise for "recent initiatives," apparently a reference to Marcos' Jan. 17 order lifting martial law.

The Philippine leader did not respond directly to the pope's appeal. He discarded his prepared welcome remarks, however, and gave an emotional, apparently extemporaneous speech apologizing for past differences between his government and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. These differences have sometimes centered on charges of human rights violations by the Marcos government.

"Forgive us, holy father," Marcos said. "Now that you are here, we resolve we shall wipe out all conflicts and set up . . . a society that is harmonious to attain the ends of God."

Marcos, eager to make the pope's visit a national occasion, laid out a grand welcome for the pope, on his first trip to the Asian continent as head of the Roman Catholic Church.

The streets of Manila were turned into a fiesta with Vatican colors of yellow and white fluttering in a breeze wafting in from Manila Bay. Hundreds of thousands of Filipinos lined the eight-mile stretch of Roxas Boulevard from the airport to the cathedral in the heart of the city to cheer the pope when he drove by in an open float decorated with fragrant jasmine flowers.

Philippines' folk art from various regions and tribal minorities was displayed in songs and dance. Flag-waving welcomes gave the pontiff a fleeting glimpse of the diverse cultures in this archipelago where Christianity took root 460 years ago and where its 48 million people still profess their faith.

Marcos declared a two-day holiday The ceremonies included a 21-gun salute and a fly-by of jet fighters. Moments after stepping off his chartered Alitalia DC10, the pope kissed the ground as is his custom on arrival in foreign countries.

Security was tight, assured by nearly 5,000 plainclothesmen at the airport and coordinated by 32 generals. But the only reported incidents occurred when a photo messenger crashed into a police car with his motorcycle and a woman by-stander who was slightly injured.

The 60-year-old pontiff's first stop on his 12-day Asian tour, yesterday in Karachi, was marred by the explosion of a grenade shortly before he was to say Mass. Manila police also recalled that a Bolivian painter lunged at Pope Paul VI with a knife in 1970 during the first papal visit to the Philippines.

The pomp and ceremony surrounding the first visit by a pope since then failed to gloss over the serious issues that John Paul and Marcos addressed: testy church-state relations and a radical faction of the Philippine Roman Catholic Church edging closer to revolutionary violence as an answer to pressing social ills.

Relations between the church and the Marcos government have been uneasy over the last decade, exacerbated by his imposition of martial law. When Marcos lifted it last month, it was with the papal visit in mind. But the cleavage between the church hierarchy and the government has threatened to grow wider over problems of economic inequality and social injustice in a country where much wealth is still in the hands of some 200 families.

Church suspicion of the government has manifested itself in many ways, such as the squabble over the

question of whose invitation the pope had accepted to come to the Philippines and the church fear that the visit would be sidetracked into an endorsement of the martial law record.

Pope John Paul II answered the question in his arrival remarks at the airport. Under a yellow canopy on the tarmac, the pope stressed that Cardinal Jaime Sin, the head of the Philippine church hierarchy, had invited him to beatify Filipino, Lorenzo Ruiz, and 15 other Japanese and European martyrs in a ceremony Tuesday.

"This is the principal reason I came," the pope said. "I came on a visit of religious and pastoral nature to proclaim his gospel and salvation in his name as successor of the apostle Peter."

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