

Amid Ivory Coast's Crisis, Bishops Make a Plea

Too Much Blood Has Been Shed, They Say

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, FEB. 7, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Catholic bishops of Ivory Coast made an urgent plea at the close of their recent plenary assembly.

"Too much blood has already been spilled in this country," the prelates said in a statement. "Renounce the spirit of hatred, vengeance and mutual mistrust: It is the only solution to arrive at the elections planned for 2005 with a serene spirit."

In their "Appeal for a Return to Moral, Religious and Spiritual Values in the Resolution of the Ivorian Crisis," as reported by the Missionary Service News Agency, the prelates insisted on the need for dialogue and the country's reunification, an objective they say can only be achieved with the international community's support.

"With France, our privileged associate, we would like to open a new page of relations, based on mutual respect, equality, justice and fraternity," reads their message.

Ivory Coast, a French colony until 1960, "is a sovereign nation. And, as such, deserves respect," the bishops said. "Ivorians, for their part, should give the same respect to those they receive in their territory."

Referring to the crisis that broke out in September 2002, when a failed coup against President Laurent Gbagbo led to rebellion in the north central area of the country, the Ivorian bishops again call for dialogue between the sides, warning that any interruptions or exclusions from it would lead "inevitably to war."

In view of upcoming elections, the prelates appealed to youth to be on guard against political manipulation. "Do not allow yourselves to be adulated by certain politicians without great moral values who only wish to use you," the bishops said.

The prelates appealed to soldiers and paramilitary bodies to defend citizens and to give up practices such as fraud, "a real cancer of society which damages are country and its economy."

The episcopate also made an appeal to journalists and media personnel, to foster peace by being fair and objective in their reporting on the crisis.

On Nov. 7, John Paul II appealed for the silencing of arms in Ivory Coast and a return to dialogue, at the height of the tension caused by the killing the previous day of nine French soldiers. Violence broke out following an aerial attack by the Ivory Coast's army against French troops that were part of an international peacekeeping force.

About 16.5% of Ivory Coast's 17.3 million people are Catholics. Muslims constitute 35% to 40% of the population, while animists comprise about 25% to 40%.