

South Africa backers shout down U.S. bishops

Supporters of a far-right group with alleged ties to South African intelligence agencies disrupted a Catholic bishops' press conference on apartheid and the African famine. The churchmen did manage to deliver a strong anti-apartheid message signed by 17 U.S. bishops. But shouting by self-described journalists who work with fringe politician Lyndon LaRouche Jr. — whom the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith has referred to as a "small-time Hitler" — then broke up the press conference and prevented questioning by genuine reporters.

Bishop Daniel Reilly, Norwich, chairman of the Catholic Relief Services board, denounced apartheid as "an evil . . . diabolical, immoral" system that "must somehow be eliminated." If South Africa does not change voluntarily, there will be "some sort of terrible uprising, and a justifiable uprising," Reilly predicted.

Reilly said people he met during a recent visit to South Africa resent the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" with South Africa. (Under that policy, the United States has opposed UN resolutions condemning apartheid, allowed export of military goods to South Africa and softened its criticism of South African human rights violations.)

Because of America's "own sad history of apartheid" in the United States, this country should take the lead in challenging South Africa's "institutionalized system of injustice," said Brooklyn Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sullivan.

Church leaders also urged the United States to give more aid to African famine victims. Father Joseph Donders, who heads the African Faith and Justice Network, said that "experts knew up to two years ago what would happen in Africa this year." If developed nations had helped then, he said, Africa could have avoided some of the suffering that now threatens the health of 150 million to 250 million Africans. Reilly told *NCR* that the U.S. government is now "responding very well" to African hunger but that it should do even more.

— Steve Askin