

Argentine church calls for national reconciliation

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--The Argentine Roman Catholic church has for the first time called for a "national reconciliation" as a way to "erase the drama of unhealed wounds."

This was the first official church pronouncement on the acts of political violence which took place during the so-called "dirty war" carried on by the military government against political subversives between 1976 and 1983.

In a sermon, the auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires, Monsignor Raul Rossi said that the church "has the desire to collaborate in the building of an Argentina which will overcome the pain of those years."

Father Rossi called for the forgiveness of the acts of political violence which occurred during that time, and the development of a national reconciliation. He said this could occur when people would no longer listen to revenge or cynicism.

The bishop's message came at a time of national debate over the events of the "dirty war". A former military official, Adolfo Scilingo, has publicly confessed that he was part of activities which saw between 1,500 and 2,000 detainees thrown alive into the ocean from military planes.

Human rights groups have accused the church of supporting the violence and giving consolation and counseling to those who participated. Argentine bishops have agreed to investigate church complicity in the violence, but not until near the end of this decade.

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