

MEMORANDUM

October 30, 1991

TO: Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk, President NCCB/USCC
Archbishop John R. Roach, Chairman, International
Policy Committee

FROM: Bishop James A. Griffin

SUBJ: Pastoral Visit to Peru, October 20-24, 1991

At the request of Archbishop Roach, I visited Peru in late October in representation of USCC, as well as of CRS, for the purpose of expressing our solidarity with the Church and people of Peru at this very difficult time, and to consult with leaders of the Church on ways we may be able to be of assistance to them. I was accompanied on the trip by Mr. Thomas E. Quigley, USCC Latin American affairs advisor.

Background. In late August, following the recent killings by terrorists of three foreign priests in Peru, Archbishop Roach wrote to Bishop Jose Dammert of Cajamarca, President of the CEP, on two distinct matters: one, to express USCC condolences and concern over the deaths of the missionaries, and the other to consult on the question of the US military aid then being readied to combat the narcotics traffic.

Bishop Dammert replied on September 24, expressing gratitude for our support and extending an invitation for a USCC visit in the very near future. Because of a scheduled late October visit by several European justice and peace commissions, for which the bishops' social action commission (CEAS) would be organizing a major seminar on the current happenings, and because the bishops' permanent committee would be meeting in extraordinary session October 22-24, Bishop Dammert asked for the visit during that time period.

The Visit:

Bishop Dammert's letter defined the purpose of the visit as threefold:

1. As an expression of solidarity between our churches.
2. As support for the Peruvian Church's efforts to defend life and build peace.
3. As a means of bringing pressure on government to change ways of acting that are contrary to morality and human dignity.

The visit was also intended to provide USCC, as is usually the case in such trips, with information and first-hand impressions on a range of issues relevant to our pastoral concerns. To this end, much our time in Lima was spent in the following meetings:

1. CEAS Seminar. A series of presentations on the current reality by recognized experts on the economic, political, military and social conditions of the country; organized originally for the visiting Europeans, this provided excellent preparation for all that followed.

2. Meeting with the Permanent Council of the CEP. The amplified Permanent Council, about 22 bishops present, graciously received us during part of their three-day meeting, providing the opportunity to express our solidarity with the church in Peru and our desire to be of assistance where possible. The bishops expressed their gratitude for previous USCC attention to their situation and for this present visit.

3. Informal meeting with key bishops. Through CEAS we also had the opportunity for a wide-ranging and very frank discussion with Bishops Dammert, Bambaren, Calderon, Irizar and Guibord.

4. Catholic Relief Services/Peru. In addition to providing every needed service, including much of our transportation and a pair of social events, the staff of CRS made highly informative presentations on the work and scope of CRS in Peru, introducing us as well to several of the other NGOs with which CRS collaborates. The CRS work consists essentially in programs for integrated rural development, for urban income and employment generation, and for legal and civil rights, plus a capacity for responding to emergency situations. I will be reporting on this separately to the CRS Board of Directors but I want to record here my great satisfaction and appreciation for the outstanding work of CRS/Peru.

5. Caritas del Peru. We visited the headquarters and met with several of the staff of this large and important NGO with which CRS has worked closely for years, and which has assumed full responsibility for the USAID food programs formerly run by CRS. Caritas is also deeply involved in responding to the cholera crisis.

6. CEAS. Apart from the seminar, we spent time at the CEAS offices, being briefed by key staff on the extensive programs for social action conducted in various dioceses by this organization of the bishops. Except for the three priest associate secretaries (all of whom happen to be from the US) and the bishop president, the 60-member staff are all laypersons.

7. Meeting with US and other church workers. Some thirty foreign-born missionaries, several of them superiors of their communities, were meeting at the St. James Society center house and invited us to join them for discussion and lunch.

8. US Ambassador. We had a useful exchange with Ambassador Anthony Quainton at the Embassy.

The Issues:

1. Shining Path. The immediate occasion for the visit was the killing of four foreign missionaries (an Australian sister, two Polish friars, an Italian diocesan) and the attempted killing of a Spanish priest, all by the terrorist group Shining Path/Sendero Luminoso (SL). Since 1989, SL has mounted attacks of growing intensity against the church, especially aimed at the programs of social development and assistance that, in the SL view, keep the people from rising up. The killing of the foreign church workers and direct threats against others, including US personnel, make the issue of particular relevance to the church in the US.

The perceived support, moral or financial, that SL may enjoy in Europe and North America was an issue of special concern to the bishops. Bishop Dammert has written a letter in this regard to several episcopal conferences. USCC has been monitoring the issue for some time now, and we assured the bishops that staff would continue to do so.

2. US Military Aid The Congress recently approved a \$24.5 million military aid package to aid Peru in combatting the drug traffic (strongly conditioned by human rights criteria), but denied a requested \$10 million proposal for training two anti-narcotics brigades. One concern in Congress was the danger of US trainers becoming drawn in to the Peruvian army's war against SL.

The bishops share this concern about increased US military presence, which they oppose strongly. They do favor, however, aid to the military that would improve the very low standard of living of the soldiers, partly to deter the practice of theft, extortion and other abuses committed by the military.

3. US Economic Aid The Congress also released a requested \$60 million in economic aid, most of which is to help Peru meet debt servicing payments on its \$23 billion external debt. The bishops favor economic assistance that promotes growth and productivity, that helps repair or improve infrastructure (e.g., roads needed for marketing products grown in substitution for coca), and that provides emergency help. Apart from USAID food programs, little US economic aid is directed to these ends.

4. The Debt Peru's crippling external debt is the principal cause of much of what has gone wrong in Peru in recent years. In the mid-80s, the Alan Garcia government embarked on a repayment schedule equivalent to only 10% of export earnings, resulting in Peru becoming a pariah in international monetary circles. Succeeding Garcia, Alberto Fujimori imposed drastic adjustment measures that, while gradually restoring confidence among international lenders, has plunged the population into a state of unprecedented misery. Less than 10% of the population is today earning even an adequate income, and the provision of essential social services is dependent almost entirely on non-governmental agencies such as those of the church. Even the cholera epidemic which has ravaged much of Peru is a consequence of the debt and what has flowed from it.

The position of the bishops is simply that debts should be paid but not at the cost of social suffering.

5. Armed Forces/Police The police and military are said to be poorly trained and are certainly badly paid. Soldiers earn the equivalent of \$1 a day and have to pay for their own uniforms, weapons and ammunition. There seems to be more improvement on human rights in the army than in the police, and Amb. Quainton regretted the Congressional elimination of funding the two army battalions partly because the program offered prime opportunity for influencing army behavior.

Some of the bishops also regretted the detachment from such matters as army human rights violations on the part of the military vicariate, which defines its work as of a purely sacramental nature. There is some suggestion that this may soon change.

6. Narcotraffic There is consensus that both the army and the insurgency are deeply involved in the drug trade, primarily in receiving huge amounts of money in kickbacks or "taxes" from the traffickers. The goal of crop substitution and alternative development is impossible while SL controls much of the coca area, and as the counter-narcotic efforts increase, the growing areas are moving farther to the east.

The Peruvian bishops have spoken several times on the drug problem and the bishop president of CEAS is looking forward to the CELAM drug meeting, which we learned in Lima has been once again postponed. A general view expressed by Bishop Dammert is that "the consuming countries participate in our crisis", and that each has a responsibility to help the other.

7. National Council for Peace There is presently a major effort to bring all sectors together to press for national unity, cooperation and peace, which President Fugimori has asked the church, in the person of CEP president Bishop Dammert, to preside. While some of the bishops (and apparently all of the clergy and religious we met with) were in favor of this, the CEP permanent council voted instead to name a representative to the peace council but not to lead it.

8. Role of the Church in Peru Divisions within the Peruvian church, especially among the bishops, have often been noted by journalists and other observers. Certainly, the several bishops we had the opportunity of talking with--diocesans, Opus Dei, Jesuits, nationals and foreign born--represent a variety of views on many issues. The main difference we had the chance to observe concerned the role of the church in the above-mentioned national council for peace.

My strong impression, however, is that there is a high degree of unity both within the episcopate and among all sectors of the church in naming and confronting the overwhelming crises their country is suffering. According to several bishops, the church is more united than it was a decade ago, especially in facing the twin problem of economic poverty and subversive violence. And according to the social analysts of the CEAS seminar, the church is the single institution most able to unify and give spirit to the people to find the way out.

The last three governments, all the political parties, the once powerful labor unions, the armed forces and the police have all become discredited over recent years, and the church alone retains the allegiance and confidence of the masses as well as much of the elites. There are areas where SL is active, which the military has essentially abandoned, but the church is present. Over the last thirty years especially, the church has been close to the people and has actively encouraged the base communities and popular movements.

Follow-up:

International justice and peace staff will continue to monitor, and report as appropriate to the Peruvian conference, on the following:

1. Support in the US for SL. While we believe it is largely restricted to a very small radical fringe element associated with the Revolutionary Communist Party, which does occasionally get people in the streets for events like the Fugimori visit recently, the current opinion is that SL is generally seen for what it is, a terrorist organization and not Robin Hood defenders of the people. IJP will gather further data and share with CEAS.

2. US economic and military aid. Ways should be sought to encourage greater and more diversified economic aid to Peru, and to investigate possibilities of future military aid encompassing concerns expressed by the church.

3. Peruvian external debt. There seems to be no more difficult issue in Latin America generally than the debt crisis. While our 1986 pastoral letter "Economic Justice for All" and the 1989 statement on "Relieving Third World Debt" are well known and appreciated, some further follow-up might be called for.

4. Drug traffic and US anti-narcotics policy. We should continue to monitor the US "Andean Initiative" both at the policy-making level in Washington and in maintaining contact with the relevant church agencies in the Andean countries. Formal consultation with the region's hierarchies on the issue will apparently have to wait for the re-scheduled CELAM meeting.

5. Fundamentalist groups. Although not a major item of discussion on this visit, despite the furor over the evangelical support for Fugimori's candidacy, Bishop Irizar did request some specific information which staff will provide.