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LATIN AMERICA BUREAU

Division for Latin America Department of International Affairs
United States Catholic Conference
1401 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005 Phone:[202]628-9840

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rev. Louis M. Colonnese, Director of the Division for Latin America, Department of International Affairs, U.S. Catholic Conference has announced his total support of the Cuban bishops' request that the trade embargo against their country be lifted.

"Our brothers in Christ, the bishops of Cuba, have requested that the Cuban trade embargo be lifted because they feel it is causing their people unnecessary suffering and is obstructing the attainment of their full human development," Father Colonnese said.

"We (Division for Latin America, USCC) share the concern of the Cuban bishops over the human suffering caused by the current embargo and urge the U.S. government and the O.A.S. to give serious consideration to their plea that the embargo be lifted. We concur in their request not from political nor economic motivation, but because we agree with the Cuban bishops' assessment that the embargo offends against the dignity of the Cuban people by imposing unnecessary suffering and deprivation."

The eight Cuban bishops now active in that country issued a pastoral letter on April 10th which was read in all Cuban churches on April 20th. The pastoral letter quotes Pope Paul VI's encyclical "On the Development of

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Peoples", the Holy Father's speeches during his Bogota visit and the Latin American bishops' guidelines on renewal and socio-economic reform issued at Medellin, Colombia last September.

"In seeking the common good of our people and of our faithful, in serving the poorer among them, according to the command of Jesus and the commitment at Medellin," the Cuban bishops' pastoral stated, "we denounce the unjust conditions of the blockade, which is contributing to unnecessary suffering, and making all efforts at development more difficult."

Father Colonnese said that there are abundant quotes from Pope Paul's encyclical "Populorum Progressio", the Pope's speeches in Colombia and the Medellin documents which support the stand taken by the Cuban bishops. He added that the collective pastoral letter of the U.S. hierarchy issued on November 15, 1968 also supports this position in its statements on "The Family of Nations" and the dignity of human life. He then quoted two excerpts from the U.S. pastoral letter which he said embody the same Christian concerns which motivated the Cuban bishops to request an end to the embargo.

"Practices in dealing with civilian populations, prisoners of war and refugees are always in need of review and reform," Father Colonnese quoted from the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter.

"It is the duty of our political leadership," Father Colonnese said quoting another excerpt, "of citizens and especially of believers who acknowledge the brotherhood of man, to promote and develop the spirit of international concern, cooperation and understanding."

The Director of the Division for Latin America stressed that the U.S. Church would certainly endorse Pope Paul VI's condemnation

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"the imperialism of money" and the Holy Father's frequent pleas for more equitable international trade policies. Father Colonnese referred to a quote by Pope Paul that "sovereign states have the right to conduct their own affairs, to decide their own policies and to move freely towards the kind of society they choose." He added that the Holy Father has said there must be "no interference in their political life or subversion of their social structures" through economic coercion.

"I have great faith in the ability of the Latin American nations to achieve the fullness of their spiritual and material potential through a process of socio-economic and political self-determination," Father Colonnese said. "Therefore, I cannot help but share the opinion of many Latin Americans that the trade embargo against Cuba ignores humanitarian considerations in an effort to stifle the efforts of the Cuban people to strive for self-determination. I offer no polemic endorsing nor condemning the desirability of the Cuban socialistic experiment. I plead only for those who suffer daily because of an embargo which increasing numbers of concerned people feel is not justified.

Father Colonnese, who recently returned from a two-month fact-finding trip through Latin America, said that many Latin Americans share the opinion that the embargo seriously infringes upon Cuba's self-determination. He labeled such support as "certainly not unanimous" but "significant enough to warrant careful and thorough consideration" of the Cuban bishops' appeal to lift the embargo.

"We (Division for Latin America, USCC) will continue to plead for aid for underdeveloped nations and will always insist that this aid must not injure the dignity or right of self-determination of the

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the peoples receiving such assistance," Father Colonnese said.

"Justice demands that neither private property nor inequitable international commerce be used to suppress the legitimate demands of peoples striving for national sovereignty and economic sufficiency."

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