



national catholic news service

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NC NEWS SERVICE REPORT FOR MONDAY, APRIL 21, 1986

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COSTA LOPES April 21, 1986 (450 words)

FORMER EAST TIMOR CHURCH OFFICIAL HOPES U.S. RAISES RIGHTS ISSUES

By Tracy Early

NEW YORK (NC) — Msgr. Martinho da Costa Lopes, apostolic administrator of Dili, East Timor, from 1977 to 1983, said he hopes American Catholics encourage President Reagan to raise the East Timor issue when he visits Indonesia April 28-May 1.

The monsignor, a native of East Timor, said in a mid-April interview that he asked Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York for prayers of American Catholics and their help in getting East Timor on Reagan's agenda with Indonesian officials. Cardinal O'Connor heads the U.S. Catholic Conference Committee on Social Development and World Peace. The White House, however, said Reagan will visit the Indonesian island of Bali, a South Pacific resort, and plans no official functions during his visit, part of a longer trip to the Far East.

Msgr. Costa Lopes said that "the world should open its eyes" to the denial of justice and human rights in East Timor and insist that Indonesia negotiate a solution to the problem.

He said fighting had continued in East Timor since Indonesian troops entered in late 1975, and that the East Timor people would continue fighting as long as they were denied their freedom. "Our right of self-determination is not negotiable," he said.

Msgr. Costa Lopes was interviewed in New York the day he was returning to his exile home in Portugal. He had been in the United States since March 29 and had talked with government officials in Washington as well as church leaders and others in Washington, New York and Boston.

He said that he became "persona non grata" with the Indonesian government when, in an address to 12,000 people, he denounced atrocities committed by government soldiers. He said the people there trusted the Catholic Church very much and, when he celebrated Mass in a prison incarcerating political prisoners, he was told of many abuses by the soldiers. His successor, Msgr. Carlos Filipe X. Belo, is not allowed to celebrate Mass at the prison, he added.

Msgr. Costa Lopes said he accepted a Vatican request that he resign his post as apostolic administrator and leave the country after incurring government hostility. Since May 1983 he has been in "exile," not allowed to return, but has been working full time from his Portuguese base for the freedom of his country, he said.

During the colonial period, East Timor was ruled by Portugal. Independence for East Timor was declared in 1975. Indonesia contends that it entered the area to free it from civil war and likely takeover by a revolutionary group.

The population of East Timor is estimated at 600,000, with an estimated 393,000 Catholics. But in predominantly Moslem Indonesia, Catholics are a small minority.

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