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'AM-CUBA-VATICAN
CUBAN BISHOPS OFF TO ROME TO REPORT TO POPE:
HAVANA, AUG 17: REUTER - THE ARCHBISHOP OF HAVANA AND HEAD OF THE CUBAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, MON. JAIME ORTEGA LEFT FOR ROME WEDNESDAY WHERE HE AND SIX OTHER CUBAN BISHIPS WILL REPORT TO THE POPE ON THE SITUATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CUBA AND THE PRESENT STATE OF CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS ON THE ISLAND, THE CUBAN NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY, AIN, REPORTED WEDNESDAY.

ACCORDING TO WESTERN DIPLOMATS IN HAVANA, THE BISHOPS WILL ALSO BROACH THE QUESTION A VISIT TO CUBA BY THE POPE. CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO HAS SAID THAT A PAPAL VISIT WOULD BE WELCOMED +AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME.+ AT A PRESS CONFRENCE IN ECUADOR LAST WEEK, CASTRO PRIASED THE POPE FOR HIS SENSITIVITY TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR AND DISPOSSESSED DURING HIS VISITS TO LATIN AMERICA.

IN SEPTEMBER 1987 POPE JOHN PAUL VISITED THE CUBAN EXILE COMMUNITY IN MIAMI BUT DID NOT GO TO CUBA ITSELF.

ARCHBISHOP ORTEGA SAID IN A RECENT INTERVIEW THAT THERE HAS BEEN A GRADUAL AND SUSTAINED OFFICIAL POLICY OF IMPROVING CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS OVER PAST YEARS. HE SAID THAT THE CREATION OF A RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF THE CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY THREE YEARS AGO HAS FACILITED THE SOLUTION OF MANY OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS.

IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE IN QUITO LAST WEEK, CASTRO SAID THAT +IN GENERAL I CAN SAY THAT RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH ARE NORMAL BECAUSE OUR REVOLUTION WAS NEVER INSPIRED BY AN ANTI-RELIGIOUS SPIRIT.+

IN NOVEMBER 1985, ARCHBISHOP ORTEGA AND OTHER TOP CUBAN PRELATES MET WITH CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO. LAST YEAR THE ARCHBISHOP SPOKE OF +SOME FRUSTRATIONS AND PERHAPS IMPATIENCE+ IN REFERRING TO THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN CORRECTING SOME GRIEVANCE RAISED BY THE CHURCH.

THE GRIEVANCES CONCERNED ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BELIEVERS AS REGARDS ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND MORE IMPORTANT POSTS IN GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY. THE CHURCH HSAS ALSO ASKED FOR GREATER ACCESS TO RADIO AND TELEVISION AND THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE CHURCH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE CONFINES OF THE CHURCH BUILDINGS.

CHURCH OFFICIALS HAVE LAUDED THE GOVERNMENT'S COOPERATION IN HELPING TO MAINTAIN CERTAIN CHARITABLE AND SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITIONS. SIX HOMES FOR OLD PEOPLE, A LEPROSY CENTER AND A SANITORIUM FOR THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED WHICH ARE RUN BY CATHOLIC NUNS ARE SUPPORTED BY FUNDS OF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT.

LAST YEAR THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT ALLOWED THE CHURCH TO IMPORT 30,000 BIBLES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 15 YEARS. EARLIER THIS YEA R, FOLLOWING AN APPEAL FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE GOVERNMENT AUTHORIZED THE ENTRY OF 19 FOREIGN PRIESTS AND AN EXPATRIATE CUBAN CLERGYMAN TO WORK ON THE COMMUNIST ISLAND.
==REUTER LEM
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