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Pope calls for Libyan cease-fire

Francis X. Rocca Religion News Service | Mar. 29, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI is calling for an immediate cease-fire and peace negotiations in Libya, where U.S. and allied European forces have been targeting military assets controlled by the country?s dictator, Col. Moammar Gadhafi.

Benedict made his statement on Sunday, following his weekly recitation of the Angelus prayer in St. Peter?s Square, saying he was ?progressively more concerned about the well-being and safety of civilians? in Libya.

?I make a heartfelt appeal to international organizations and to political and military leaders for the immediate launch of a dialogue that will halt the use of arms,? the pope said.

The pope?s words marked a shift from his statement a week earlier, on March 20, when he urged ?political and military leaders? to ensure Libyans? ?access to humanitarian relief,? but notably stopped short of calling for an end to the United Nations-authorized attacks on Gadhafi.

In calling for a diplomatic solution on Sunday, Benedict said that ?at times of greater tension it is even more essential ... to support even the faintest sign of openness and of desire for reconciliation between the parties involved.?

Referring generally to recent violence elsewhere in the Middle East, Benedict recommended the ?path of dialogue and reconciliation ... in the search for just and fraternal coexistence? throughout the region.

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