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Tripoli fighting continues, bishop stuck in Italy

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VATICAN CITY -- As fighting continues in Tripoli and the search goes on for Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, the bishop of Tripoli is stuck in Italy but hoping to return to the North Africa nation soon.

"The fact that, as I have been told, some Libyans are trying to return home is a good sign because that means security conditions have improved in some parts of the country. This encourages me because, as soon as possible, I'll go back, too," said Bishop Giovanni Martinelli of Tripoli.

The Vatican's missionary news agency, Fides, interviewed Bishop Martinelli Aug. 26 in Italy. Rebel forces claimed Aug. 22 that they had taken the capital and were hunting Gadhafi, but there were still reports of fighting between rebels and Gadhafi loyalists Aug. 26 in Tripoli.

"I'm anxious to return to Tripoli to be with the community and the priests," he said. "Unfortunately, up to this point, I've been advised not to leave because the usual routes for returning to Libya have been blocked. But the fact that some Libyans are returning gives me hope that I can go back soon," the bishop said.

As for the future of the country, Bishop Martinelli told Fides, "until we know what's happened to Gadhafi, it's difficult to make predictions. The situation is still dangerous because there are loyalists ready to give their lives for him."

However, he said, "in Libya there are impressive, intelligent and well-prepared people who can lead the country. There is an elite group capable of taking control of the situation and planning the country's future, safeguarding its unity."

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