NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Catholics don't rejoice, but recall Gadhafi's brutality

Doreen Abi Raad Catholic News Service | Oct. 21, 2011

Libyans gather in front of the White House in Washington Oct. 20 to celebrate the death of Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi. (CNS photo/Molly Riley, Reuters)

BEIRUT -- Catholic leaders said they could not rejoice at the death of Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, but they recalled some of his more brutal moments and speculated on the future of Christians in the region.

"Gadhafi brutalized people for 42 years. He lived by the sword and, therefore, it's not surprising that he would die by the sword," said Habib Malik, associate professor of history at the Lebanese American University, Byblos campus.

"The manner of his death was gruesome and, no matter how evil a person might have been, such an ending is never something to rejoice about; however, he is now dead and his people are justifiably relieved and hopeful about starting a new chapter in their history," he said.

Malik, a Lebanese Catholic, recalled Gadhafi's role at the outset of the Lebanese war in 1975.

"He sent mercenaries and snipers to Beirut as well as to Christian coastal towns, where they murdered scores of innocent civilians, and he made many outrageous statements at the time against Lebanon's Christians," said Malik, author of the 2010 book "Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East."

"In addition to all this he was, of course, responsible for the disappearance of Iman Moussa Sadr," a prominent Lebanese Shiite cleric who vanished during a 1978 visit to Libya.

Maronite Father Camille Moubarak, president of Sagesse University in Beirut and former dean of its faculty of political science, said : "Gadhafi is one of the leaders who, in the beginning, was good for his people. When he became bad after some years, the possibility of change was easy."

However, said Father Moubarak, world powers "were with Gadhafi. So after this, we can say that not just Gadhafi alone was the dictator."

He said it is hard to tell what will happen because of regional instability. He said Libya -- and Syria, Yemen and Egypt -- could go from one dictator to another. As time goes on, "the people will accept any solution to get out

from the war," he added.

In times of instability, he said, bad people wield power over the weak.

"And who is the weak group in these countries? The Christians. That's why these kinds of wars are dangerous for the Christians in these kinds of countries," he said.

Archbishop Tommaso Caputo, apostolic nuncio to Libya and Malta, told the Vatican-based Fides news agency that in four years of traveling throughout Libya: "I have come to believe that the Libyan heart is nourished by the desire of peace and harmony. This is what we hope for the future."

Hours after Gadhafi's death, the Vatican press office said it marked the end of a "harsh and oppressive regime" based on power instead of human dignity. It expressed hope that the bloodshed would end and that the new Libyan government would open a rebuilding phase based on "a spirit of inclusion" and social justice.

In a separate interview, Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said the important thing in post-Gadhafi Libya was whether true participatory democracy can be instituted.

"The world can never celebrate the death of a person, not even a criminal," he told the Italian agency TM News. He said Gadhafi could have found exile in another country to "reflect on and apologize for what he has done, but he wanted to fight to the finish. I'm sorry it ended like that."

Cardinal Turkson said it was not yet clear where the "Arab spring" would lead and whether it would help the minority Christian populations of the area. In Libya, he noted, the church is a church of "presence and witness," made up largely of foreigners.

He said that the Christian populations in Iraq and Egypt were probably better off under previous regimes that have been overthrown.

"We hope the rediscovery of freedom in these months is not only freedom from certain leaders, but freedom for everyone, including religious freedom for all communities," he said.

But the priest who served in Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 when a bomb exploded on Pan Am Flight 103 said he regretted that the Libyan dictator was not allowed to live when rebels

captured him Oct. 20 in a drainage pipe outside city of Sirte. He said he thought Gadhafi should have had to stand trial for the "atrocities and crimes" he might have committed.

"We would like the truth of what happened even though Gadhafi had died," said Father Patrick Keegans, now the administrator of St. Mary Cathedral in Ayr, Scotland. "It is very convenient for some governments that Gadhafi had died, because they clearly had connections with him that were rather suspect."

John Thavis at the Vatican and Simon Caldwell in Manchester, England, contributed to this story.

Source URL (retrieved on *06/19/2013 - 22:07*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/catholics-dont-rejoice-recall-gadhafis-brutality