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**Baptist groups in Yugoslavia
ask for support from the West**

By Bob Allen

HAMBURG, Germany (ABP) -- Two Baptist groups in Yugoslavia have appealed to Baptist leaders in the West to support them by opposing NATO air strikes against their country while taking to task a particular Southern Baptist leader who is on record as supporting the action.

Leaders of the Baptist Churches in Serbia and the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia issued a letter asking Baptists in Europe and the United States to publicly condemn NATO's "illegal aggression" and work for a peaceful solution in the Balkans.

The letter invites Baptists from the West to send a delegation to see first-hand the effects of NATO air strikes. It also asks fellow Baptists to "help clear our name by making a clear distance from all immoral politicians (especially those who hold our Baptist name) who are causing this tragedy." That apparently refers to President Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist, whom the letter criticizes for claiming a "moral imperative" to justify the attacks.

"We regret when atheist politicians from any country do evil things, but we are not surprised by it," the leaders stated in their letter. "However, when politicians who call themselves Christians engage in inexplicable evil and when other Christians, especially Baptists, support it, then we are at a loss for words."

The leaders said they were grateful that some religious groups around the world have denounced the NATO attacks but asked why "no Baptists" are among them. "Is this because only the Baptists are right in this case or only Baptists are wrong? What happened to the well-advertised Baptist spirit of peace-and-reconciliation ministry?"

The leaders criticized a quote attributed to Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, by Baptist Press. In the quote, Land said if Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic "doesn't respond appropriately" to air strikes, NATO should destroy his heavy armor and air forces. "And if he still doesn't withdraw and agree to the peace accords, then I think the next step would be to arm his enemies," Land continued.

"We are hoping that as you are reading this you are becoming aware of our sense of loss and frustration as well as our surprise at your reaction," the Yugoslav Baptist leaders responded. "We are concerned that you may have forgotten who the enemy is. Our desire is that as believers we would all stand firm together against all forms of evil. We must combat our natural tendencies to be swayed by nationalism, pride, media or power. Satan would like to destroy and separate, but we must be steadfast in (using Paul's words in Ephesians. 5:11) having nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather expose them."

The leaders said actions by Baptists in the West have contributed to persecution of Baptists in the Balkans. "You need to know that besides the anti-American sentiment here, there is sentiment here in the larger region of Eastern Europe against evangelicals and especially against the Baptists," the letter said.

"We are already feeling ashamed of the Baptist name," they continued. "We are afraid that your actions could cause us to change the name of our denomination, or to affiliate with some other denominations that have not compromised the words of our Lord. We are ready to suffer and be persecuted for Christ, but not for a name that approves of or associates itself with evil actions."

The Baptist leaders disputed Western reports describing the strikes as a "humanitarian mission."

"We ourselves cannot call it humanitarian, because we have not seen any positive accomplishments of the 'mission' thus far," they said. Thousands have been killed and injured. Schools, hospitals, kindergartens, factories and retirement homes have been destroyed, along with miles of roads, railways and bridges. Bombing of refineries and chemical plants has "caused an ecological catastrophe with international dimensions," they said.

Numerous "collateral damages" have taken nearly as many lives as "planned damages," the Baptist leaders claimed. "On top of this, the Kosovo population" which NATO came to protect "is nearly devastated and mostly expelled from the province since this all began," they said.

"We regret that the civilized and Christian western world still supports this aggression with the explanation that they are protecting the Albanians of Kosovo," the Yugoslav Baptist leaders said.

"Where is your voice?" they asked Baptist leaders.

"In reading this, you have hopefully become fully aware of the importance of our and your words and actions regarding the future mission in this region," the letter said. "All of this we have had to write with great sadness and regret."

Recipients of the message included five Southern Baptist Convention officials: Executive Committee President Morris Chapman; International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin; IMB vice presidents Don Kammerdiener and Avery Willis; and Randy Bell, a missionary who formerly worked in Yugoslavia. It was not addressed to Land, though he was mentioned in the text.

Other copies of the message were sent to home and regional offices of the Baptist World Alliance, the European Baptist Federation, European Baptist Press Service and several specific Baptist unions in Europe.

A spokesman for Land said May 21 that the Southern Baptist leader had not responded to the Yugoslav Baptist leaders and could not be reached for further comment.

Land, however, reiterated his support for the NATO attacks in statements reported by Baptist Press May 19. "If the 20th century has taught us anything, it is that brutal aggression -- unchecked and unpunished -- increases the possibility of future aggression geometrically," he said.

Land said a recent resolution by Methodist bishops that called for an end to the attack implies "a moral equivalency between NATO's response and Milosevic's massacres, group rape and genocidal ethnic cleansing" that does not exist.

"There is no moral equivalency," Land said, adding that a "just peace" in the Balkans "requires that Mr. Milosevic be removed from power."

Kammerdiener, executive vice president for the International Mission Board, said the organization does not plan to issue a statement responding to the message. "We grieve for everybody that's involved, but our stance has never been to take sides in a political issue of this sort," he said.

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-- Martha Skelton of the European Baptist Press Service contributed to this story.

U.S. boosts relief aid for Kosovar refugees

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- With another \$15-million aid package announced May 18 by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the U.S. government's support for ethnic Albanians who have fled Kosovo now tops \$200 million.

The first lady announced the latest relief package during a White House briefing on her recent trip to the Balkans.

She said the \$15 million in humanitarian assistance would be funneled through United Nations organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international and nongovernmental organizations providing refugee relief. Some of the funds will also be used to relocate 20,000 refugees to the United States.

In addition to monies already put into the relief effort, a supplemental appropriations measure before Congress would provide another \$721 million in assistance for Kosovar refugees.

The first lady and others who recently toured relief camps for refugees praised the humanitarian efforts that have been funded by government and private sources.

"I don't know that any of us who have not endured what these men, women and children have can fully comprehend what they have suffered or the courage it takes to speak out about their experiences," said Clinton, who toured a camp in Macedonia.

"I found it difficult in the refugee camp to ask and then to listen to the stories that the refugees told me because it's a very painful experience for them to have to relive that."

Clinton said she heard "heartbreaking stories of families separated, of girls raped, of men executed, of homes destroyed."

"These tragic stories are happening every day and happening even today," she said. "And they must be told and retold and never forgotten."

"Nothing makes the case more powerfully for why the United States and our NATO allies are pursuing their mission in Kosovo, and why we cannot give up until the evils perpetrated by [Yugoslav President Slobodan] Milosevic and his regime have been stopped and the refugees returned home in peace and safety," she added.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, who headed the congressional delegation to the Balkans, cited the cooperative efforts of nations and religious organizations to meet the humanitarian crisis of 750,000 ethnic Albanians fleeing Kosovo.

"What I saw in Macedonia was the best of us that had been brought about by the worst of us," she said.

In a separate briefing, Julia Taft, assistant secretary of state for Population, Refugee and Migration Affairs, told reporters the "humanitarian community has done a remarkable job."

Most of those fleeing Kosovo are now in neighboring states. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development, 433,300 Kosovar refugees are in Albania, 226,800 are in Macedonia and 64,000 are in Montenegro.

In addition, USAID reports that about 60,000 refugees have been moved to 28 other countries, including 2,904 to the United States.

In Albania, about 47,000 families -- 7 percent of the country's families -- are hosting 282,000 families who have fled Kosovo. Another 76,000 refugees are in Albanian camps.

Brian Atwood, USAID administrator, said the United States and others are supporting a program to increase the number of host families to 15 percent of the population, a move that would accommodate another 354,000 refugees.

The program provides host families with assistance such as blankets, mattresses, clothing, hygiene supplies, as well as an increase in monthly food rations.

In Macedonia, 76,000 refugees are living in camps and transit centers and another 120,000 are living with host families.

Taft told reporters that one of the major challenges facing relief workers is finding ways to maintain the hope of refugees in extended situations.

She noted that religious and other nongovernmental organizations have set up schools and teahouses and implemented other ways of improving the day-to-day lives of refugees. In addition, relief operations are seeking to find ways refugees can use their talents and skills.

Another concern for humanitarian officials are the estimated 600,000 ethnic Albanians now dislocated within Kosovo. Relief workers face the challenge of getting food and other supplies to them and also of planning to accommodate them should they flee Kosovo.

Those inside Kosovo, Taft said, "are looking for food and safety and not finding it."

Taft said she is concerned that "when we have a chance to go in, we're going to find the killing fields."

Taft, Clinton and other U.S. officials said the refugees are adamant about wanting to return to Kosovo.

"Refugees will go home when they believe it is safe to go home," Taft said.

Taft said Kosovars arriving in the United States are given refugee status, which allows them to stay permanently if they wish. They are grateful for the offer of safety and sanctuary, she said, "but they want to go back home."

Clinton said the same is true of refugees in Macedonia.

"The bottom line is these people want to go home," she said. "I mean, no matter how well organized these camps are becoming and how many more services are being provided, they want to go home. And I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to see that come about, so that these people can return in safety and peace."

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Texas Baptist General Board offers churches new giving option

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas has added a fifth option for churches giving to its Cooperative Program unified budget. The plan shifts more funds to ministries within the state and away from national agencies that are unpopular with moderates.

The state convention's Executive Board solidly approved the new giving option at its spring meeting May 18 in Dallas.

Churches that select the new option will channel about 73 percent of their cooperative-giving dollars to BGCT ministries. The rest will go to the Southern Baptist Convention's International and North American mission boards, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and Annuity Board in Dallas and the Baptist World Alliance in McLean, Va.

The option would exclude other traditional SBC recipients of the Cooperative Program -- five of the convention's six seminaries, the Executive Committee and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Supporters say the new option has two main purposes. It will allow churches to fund new Texas initiatives laid out by a long-range planning committee two years ago. It will also make it easier for congregations to avoid funding certain national entities whose ultraconservative leanings have lost touch with moderate Texas Baptists.

The Texas convention is one of several state groups in recent years to start offering giving options in response to conflict between moderates and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention.

For about seven decades, Texas Baptists had only one ministry-support option for funds distributed beyond the local church. Contributions to the Cooperative Program were divided, with the greater portion staying in Texas to support BGCT causes and the remainder allocated to the SBC without designation.

In 1994, the BGCT broadened the Cooperative Program, offering churches four options.

One allows churches to earmark funds solely for Texas Baptist ministries. Another follows the traditional pattern, with Texas receiving 67 percent of these receipts and the SBC getting 33 percent. The third is similar to the 67/33 split, except that churches are allowed to exclude up to five BGCT or SBC entities. The fourth enables churches to define the percentage of the BGCT/SBC division and also include other Texas ministries and up to eight other "worldwide" ministries.

The new fifth option simplifies the process for churches that want to customize their support for Texas Baptist causes, Southern Baptist missions and Southwestern Seminary, noted Mateo Rendon, chairman of the Administrative Committee and pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Corpus Christi.

A church can give to these same recipients through another option, but the process is complicated, Rendon noted, adding, "This makes it easier to understand."

The new option was initiated at the request of numerous Texas Baptists, said Leroy Fenton, chairman of the funding committee and pastor of First Baptist Church in Waxahachie. "There have been some very loud cries for this kind of opportunity," he said.

Support for the new option grew last fall, when a rival state convention -- Southern Baptists of Texas - formed, he added. Some Texas Baptists were concerned the new convention would siphon funds from the BGCT, particularly money needed to fund new initiatives.

The proposal drew some opposition during debate. The new giving option will prove to be divisive, predicted Robert Carter, pastor of Pinecrest Baptist Church in Silsbee.

"We're handing (opponents) a stick to beat us who are trying to be cooperative," Carter said. "We're trying to major on the things we agree on. Let's not major on the things we disagree on."

The four other giving plans provide plenty of options for giving to Baptist causes, added Bill Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church in Newton.

"This is a movement away from certain SBC entities -- all but one SBC seminary and certain other SBC agencies," said John Hatch, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lake Jackson.

However, the proposal recognizes reality, stressed Bobby Broyles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Earth.

Broyles expressed frustration that some Texas Baptists deny the new option will "move Texas away" from the SBC.

"I agree they have moved away from us," he said of the SBC. "But ... yes, this allows churches that want to be less cooperative with the SBC than they have been to be less cooperative."

"We're not one big, happy family anymore. We'll earn a lot more credibility from churches out there if we admit it. ... This is moving away from the SBC."

That was the essence of criticism of the plan leveled by Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee.

The option comprises an attempt "to drive a wedge between Texas Southern Baptist churches and the SBC," Chapman said. He accused BGCT leaders of "systematically" pushing "folks farther away from the SBC" through new giving options.

"Leaders of the BGCT are attempting to erode support for the Cooperative Program as it has been defined for many, many years," he said.

Two BGCT leaders countered Chapman's remarks in prepared statements. Chapman's claim "shows a lack of understanding of what Baptists in Texas are doing to increase Cooperative Program mission giving," charged BGCT President Russell Dilday.

Rather than driving a "wedge" between the BGCT and SBC, "this new option is intended for those churches that might otherwise be reluctant to give at all," Dilday said. "It actually encourages those churches to continue their support of major SBC mission causes. This plan is not a 'wedge' but a bridge for cooperation."

"It should not go unnoticed that Texas churches still contribute a major percentage of the SBC budget, and by providing our churches choices, the dollars flowing to SBC mission causes continues to increase," Dilday added.

Fenton reminded SBC leaders that "cooperation is reciprocal."

"The SBC leadership continues a process of partisan appointments to boards and agencies, a misuse of power and a political exclusiveness," he said. "The SBC wants our money for their programs without providing appropriate appointment participation."

With Executive Board approval, the plan should be implemented by Jan. 1, said Roger Hall, the convention's chief financial officer. That schedule will allow Hall's office to modify its accounting software and distribute a revised contribution form to Texas churches, he said.

However, churches that wish to contribute to the organizations listed in the new option before then may do so through designations allowed under one of the four current giving options, Hall noted.

The board voted down a motion that would have allowed messengers at the state convention this fall to have final say on whether to add a fifth option.

Burlie Taylor, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pearsall, recommended that the BGCT "decide on this." His motion failed with only four favorable votes.

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Baptists attacked in Moldova

GELO MENGIR, Moldova (ABP) -- A registered Baptist church in Gelo Mengir, Moldova, had its partially completed building destroyed and a Baptist man injured by a thrown rock as a mob of hundreds of people attacked 20 persons working on the church house.

The incident reportedly happened on May 5 after the election of a mayor. Orthodox priests led the group to the building site. They broke through a fence and invaded the property owned by the church. A

missionary working with the church, Viktor Daskaljuk, was among those attacked. One man was sent to get medical help after being hit by a rock.

The church is registered in the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Moldova and therefore also registered with the Republic of Moldova.

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-- European Baptist Press Service

Richmond seminary hires professor, plans to launch education degree

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- A local-church educator from northern Virginia has been hired as a professor of Christian education by Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Israel Galindo, pastoral associate for Christian education at Vienna Baptist Church in Vienna, Va., since 1993, is scheduled to begin teaching at the seminary in Richmond, Va., this fall, officials announced May 20.

In addition, he will work with other faculty to develop a new degree program at the school: the master of divinity in Christian education, officials said.

Galindo is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with two master's degrees and a doctorate from there. He also completed a clinical-pastoral-education program at Southeast Louisiana Hospital.

He has worked as a hospice chaplain, principal of a Christian school and has taught as an adjunct faculty member at four schools. He has written three books, "Prayers for the Church: Corporate Prayers for the Seasons of the Church," "The Craft of Christian Teaching" and the upcoming "Hear Our Prayers."

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond was founded in 1989 and opened for classes in 1991. It currently has 15 full-time faculty members and enrolled 285 students for the 1998-99 school year.

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-- By ABP staff

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