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Mexican church officials condemn casino attack

David Agren Catholic News Service | Aug. 29, 2011

MEXICO CITY -- Mexican church officials have condemned an arson attack on a casino in Monterrey, Mexico, which killed more than 50 bettors and employees and left the nation horrified as a city once considered a crown jewel of industrial development and progress descends deeper into organized crime violence.

"In terms of the criminal groups, we believed that we had seen everything. However, what happened today surprised us," said Cardinal Francisco Robles Ortega of Monterrey in a message issued late Aug. 25.

"Hopefully our authorities surprise us with a definite solution to this serious scourge. We join in prayer for those who lost their lives, for their families and so that peace is restored," the cardinal said.

A statement released late Aug. 25 by the Archdiocese of Mexico City labeled the attacks as "cowardly and abominable," and said the deaths "add to the innumerable victims of the cruelty and evil of organized crime."

Attackers burst into the Casino Royale in Monterrey Aug. 25, doused the premises with gasoline and torched the building, trapping patrons and employees, according to media reports. The Nuevo Leon state government put the death toll at 53, but some media reports said the number had reached 61.

President Felipe Calderon told the nation Aug. 26 the attacks were "terrorism" and called for three days of mourning. He also blamed the United States for the problems with organized crime violence in Mexico, saying U.S. consumption and weapons were aggravating the situation south of the border.

Organized crime violence has claimed more than 40,000 lives since Calderon took office in December 2006.

Monterrey, approximately three hours' drive south of the U.S. border at Laredo, Texas, has experienced enormous violence stemming from a turf war between rival cartels anxious to seize local drug trafficking and retailing territories.

The attacks came the same day Catholics began taking relics from Blessed John Paul II on a tour of Mexico's Catholic dioceses in an effort to bring peace to the country.

The relics arrive in Monterrey Nov. 24.

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