

Vatican Urges Un Force To Set Up Rwandan 'safe Area'

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From James Bone in New York.

THE Vatican has appealed to the United Nations to deploy peacekeeping forces to turn a religious complex in Rwanda into a "safe area" to prevent the massacre of some 30,000 mainly Tutsi civilians who have taken refuge there.

Archbishop Renato Martino, the Holy See's Representative at the UN, made the request in a letter to the Security Council after the Red Cross handed the Pope a message from Rwandan bishops. The refugees have sought sanctuary from the Hutu-led massacres in the main seminary at Kabgayi, five miles south of the Hutu rump government's base in Gitarama.

The bishops told the Pope that the religious centre, which includes

a monastery, schools and a hospital, was being protected by government forces. But they said the army could not guarantee the safety of the refugees from local Hutu militias if the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front advanced. Mgr Martino wrote to Security Council members that the refugees "are in a desperate situation which worsens with each passing hour" and appealed for "immediate action to avoid the continuation of the horrendous slaughter which already has taken so many lives".

The UN has agreed to increase its 400-man force to up to 5,500, but the first reinforcement phase, by 500 Ghanaians, has yet to happen because of a shortage of armoured personnel carriers.