

## Pope Thunders Against Abortion in Poland

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By Philip Pulella

KALISZ, Poland (Reuter) - Pope John Paul attacked abortion on Wednesday, condemning the practice as barbaric.

The 77-year-old Pope said "the world has become the arena of a battle for life," and urged all Roman Catholics to join the struggle between "the civilization of life and the civilization of death."

On the fifth day of his emotional pilgrimage home, he took sides on a divisive issue that will play a major role in Poland's parliamentary elections in September.

Addressing a crowd of 100,000 at an open-air mass at Kalisz in central Poland, he used tough language that was music to pro-Catholic conservative parties seeking to overturn the present social democratic government led by ex-communists.

"A nation which kills its own children is a nation without a future," he said, repeating a phrase he first uttered when Poland's abortion law was liberalized last October.

"The measure of civilization...is its relationship with life. A civilization which rejects the defenseless would deserve to be called a barbarian civilization even if had great successes in the field of economics, technology, art and sciences," he said.

The Pontiff called for a "general mobilization of consciences and a joint ethical effort...in order to put into action a great strategy of the defense of life."

Acknowledging the political sensitivity of his words, he departed from his prepared text to add: "It was not easy for me to say this, because I think about my nation, about its future."

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that life begins at the moment of conception and ends with natural death.

In the eight years since strongly Catholic Poland became the first Eastern European country to cast off communism, few issues have been more passionately fought than abortion.

Under communism, abortion was available on demand.

A law restricting it was passed in 1993 while former Solidarity union leader Lech Walesa, a fervent Catholic, was president.

Under the 1993 law, abortion was allowed only when pregnancy posed a threat to a woman's life, resulted from incest or rape or the foetus had severe defects.

The current leftist-dominated parliament liberalized abortion again last October in defiance of Catholic opposition.

Poland's constitutional court reopened the issue last week when it effectively declared parts of the October law unconstitutional and instructed parliament to review it within six months.

The election campaign now gathering pace pits a powerful anti-abortion alliance centered around the pro-Catholic Solidarity union against the secular-minded ex-communists for the lead in opinion polls.

The Solidarity Election Action (AWS), an umbrella group of some 30 conservative parties, put its logo on posters with the Pope's picture in the run-up to the Pontiff's visit.

In his address to the crowd, the Pope quoted from a speech that Mother Teresa of Calcutta made at the 1994 U.N. Population Conference in Cairo.

"The greatest destroyer of peace in the world today is abortion. If a mother can kill her own child, what is



there to stop you and me from killing each other," she said then.

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