

Kenyan bishops urge citizens to own up to sins for good of country

NAIROBI, Kenya – Kenya's Catholic bishops urged citizens to take responsibility for their sins so the country can move toward reconciliation after nearly a year of political havoc.

"We know that the word 'reconciliation' is much used," the Kenya Episcopal Conference said in a statement Nov. 6. "But often the word is misused."

Catholics, especially those in leadership positions, have to "first recognize our mistakes, failures and sins," the bishops said.

The process of reconciliation requires a person to recognize that his or her sin is personal, they said, adding that the sin "is not a consequence of rules fixed by law or recommendations of a report."

"Part of this reparation ... will be the seeking of forgiveness from the person one has wronged and redressing all aspects of the evil committed," said the bishops.

They said they backed the Kriegler and Waki reports – by two commissions investigating violence after the December 2007 elections – and that reconciling personal sins is part of their implementation.

The reports, released in late October, call for the prosecution of those who orchestrated the postelection violence, which killed more than 1,200 people and displaced more than 350,000 late last year and into 2008. The reports also called for the creation of a new electoral commission.

The bishops noted that recommendations from reports prior to the elections were not implemented, and that "made people skeptical." For example, they said, "the voter education program for the December 2007 elections had not prepared the people to accept that in a democracy there must be a winner and a loser."

Since the elections, the bishops said, "tensions have been created by people with

vested interests.”

“The innocence, unemployment ... and insecurity of youth have been cynically utilized, while land ownership remains at the heart of many of our problems,” they said.

“Kenya is at a crossroads,” the bishops said. “We can take this opportunity that these reports provide to confront the culture of impunity or degenerate into further crises, ineptitude and moral stagnation.”