

Polish bishops rap rejection

WARSAW, Poland - Poland's Catholic bishops criticized legislators' rejection of proposed constitutional amendments that would have protected life from the moment of conception.

"Arbitrary parliamentary arithmetic has won the upper hand over each person's elementary right to life," said the bishops in a statement April 13.

"The church in Poland will go on supporting actions by all people of good will to care for the most defenseless," they said. The "negative result" of the vote should not weaken "efforts to obtain agreement in the Polish parliament on such a fundamental question for our nation's future as the inviolability of human life."

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow urged Catholics to continue pressing for the reform, which supporters say would help Poland resist pro-abortion regulations from the European Union.

"The church has always declared itself for life, demanding its respect from conception to natural death irrespective of all political decisions," Cardinal Dziwisz told 50,000 Catholics during an April 15 Mass at the Divine Mercy center in the Krakow suburb of Lagiewniki.

"Although events of the past days fill us with sadness, we hope deep reflection on them will bear fruit in the future by securing the basic rights of the human person," Cardinal Dziwisz said.

Archbishop Jozef Zycinski of Lublin told Poland's Catholic Information Agency, KAI, April 15 that he was not surprised by the legislative result, which was "a defeat for those who think moral issues can be decided by politicians."

"We can't succumb to the illusion that politicians will come and make order among us," Archbishop Zycinski said. "Those who feel dispirited should revise their views and realize our culture of life should be built on the vision proclaimed by (Pope) John Paul II, on respect for the person and sensitivity of consciences, not on political activities."

Poland's 1993 law allows abortions only in cases of rape, incest and severe fetal damage, or if a woman's life and health are endangered. About 200 registered abortions occur yearly in Poland.

Poland has the lowest birthrate of the European Union's 27 member-states, according to a March Eurostat survey.