

# Spokesman says Vatican hopes peace prevails in Kosovo

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican is following affairs in Kosovo “with the highest hope that in this delicate moment a sense of responsibility and a spirit of peace may prevail,” said Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, papal spokesman.

Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia Feb. 17, but Serbia has vowed to fight the move. On Feb. 19, angry Serbs set fire to two border crossings between the two nations.

In a front-page commentary in the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano*, published in its Feb. 18-19 edition, Father Lombardi said that for years the Vatican had followed negotiations for the status of Kosovo, which has been administered by the United Nations since 1999 after NATO drove out Serbian forces accused of ethnic cleansing. He said Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence creates a new situation.

“The Holy See invites everyone, in particular the political leaders of Serbia and Kosovo, to show prudence and moderation and asks for a decisive and concrete commitment to avert extremist reactions and ensuing violence, so that the premise may be created for a future of respect, reconciliation and cooperation,” Father Lombardi said.

He said special attention should be given to the protection of democratic values and the rule of law and that international standards of respect for minorities should be upheld, without distinction of ethnic identity, religion, language or nationality. He added that Kosovo’s cultural and artistic Christian heritage must be protected.