

Pope: 'Nothing positive' happening in Iraq: A global survey of disasters

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Speaking from St. Peter's Basilica on Easter Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI offered a global survey of natural and human-made disasters, including military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and called on Christians to be "apostles of peace."

A day earlier, the Vatican confirmed that the pope had personally intervened with a letter to Iran on behalf of 15 captured British military personnel before their release.

In a traditional Easter message, the pope deplored a range of "natural calamities and human tragedies." Among a dozen crises, the pope spoke in detail about "violence and looting" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, upcoming elections in East Timor, and the need for a "negotiated solution" to civil war in Sri Lanka.

Four years after the fall of Baghdad to U.S.-led military forces, Benedict was strikingly pessimistic about conditions in Iraq. "Nothing positive comes from Iraq, torn apart by continual slaughter as the civil population flees," he said. The pope also noted "growing unrest and instability" in Afghanistan, where U.S. and other NATO forces have been stationed since 2001. *-Religion News Service*