

## **German Church Used Forced Labor in WWII**

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(April 9, 2008) German Cardinal Karl Lehman says a new report detailing the Church's use of forced labor in Germany during World War II is "a burden of history that our Church will keep facing up to in the future."

Although the Church acknowledged its use of forced labor in 2000, and has paid 1.5 million euros in compensation to foreign workers, a new 703 page official report issued this week is the most thorough look at the subject.

Entitled "Forced Labor and the Catholic Church 1939-1945," it documents the fate of 1,075 prisoners of war and 4,829 civilians who were forced to work for the Nazis in nearly 800 Catholic institutions, mainly hospitals, homes and monastery gardens, to boost the war effort.

The main historian behind the report, Karl-Joseph Hummel, told *Earthtimes* that the practice had not been typical and that only a limited number of Catholic facilities had used forced labor. Most of the laborers were from Poland, Ukraine and the Soviet Union and worked in hospitals, cemeteries, as domestics or on farms run by monasteries.

During the war, the Nazis shipped millions of people from conquered territories, especially from Eastern Europe, to work for the war economy in poor conditions. However, Hummel said the conditions for those in forced labor for the Church were not as bad as at some other organizations.

Hummel's report reveals that at the same time that the Church was using forced laborers, it was also enduring persecution from the Nazi regime. Hitler's feared SS expropriated more than 300 monasteries and Catholic institutions between 1940 and 1942 and thousands of Catholics were sent to concentration camps.

While speaking at a televised news conference in Mainz, Cardinal Lehmann said the report was not aimed at achieving closure and that more reconciliation efforts were planned.

"It should not be concealed that the Catholic Church was blind for too long to the fate and suffering of men, women and children from the whole of Europe who were carted off to Germany as forced laborers."

Forced labor made up more than a quarter of the workforce in Germany as the country collapsed at the end of the war. Other firms that were involved in the practice, such as Volkswagen, Siemens and Deutsche Bank, have also acknowledged their participation.

The Church, which has financed more than 200 "reconciliation" projects, said final numbers of the forced laborers they used during this period would probably never be known.

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