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Animal rights group to pope: Stop wearing fur

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An Italian animal rights group today asked Pope Benedict XVI to stop wearing fur out of "respect for the sacredness" of animals' lives.

The Italian Anti-Vivisection League said the Pope should not wear a fur hat the Vatican has ordered from a manufacturer in the northern city of Pavia ahead of his visit to a university there on April 22.

"Out of respect for the sacredness of the lives of all living species, we invite the Holy Father to arrive at a choice of high religious and ethical value by giving up fur clothing for that occasion and for the future," the group's vice president, Roberto Bennati, said in a statement.

Benedict XVI, who will celebrate his 80th birthday on Monday, regularly wears clothing with fur, particularly during outdoor ceremonies in the winter.

The animal rights group argued that he should do without fur because "valid alternatives exist that do not call for the murder of animals".

Meanwhile, Vatican officials said today that attendance for events at Saint Peter's Square had declined compared to the first year after the Pope's election.

Since April last year, about 3.4 million people have attended events at Saint Peter's Square, compared to about four million for the previous year since his election.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected Pope on April 19, 2005.

ROME

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