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Bishops ask Germany to support migrants

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BERLIN -- Africa's bishops have asked German President Christian Wulff to support them in their efforts to develop their continent as one way of slowing the flow of migrants into Europe.

Cardinal Polycarp Pengo of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, asked Wulff to urge European governments "not to see the African migrant ... as a stranger or a threat, but rather as a fellow human being who indeed is an asset and not a liability when given the opportunity."

Cardinal Pengo addressed Wulff during SECAM's March 28-April 2 meeting with the German bishops' conference in Berlin. The meeting focused on migration, especially from Africa to Europe, and the church's responsibility for refugees and migrants.

Africa's bishops "also appeal to you to support us and our governments in our quest to provide the necessary conditions for the development of Africa as one of the ways to mitigate the challenges of migration," Cardinal Pengo said, noting recent violence in North Africa and Ivory Coast.

In its work on national, regional and continental levels, SECAM emphasizes "the need for good governance, justice and peace" and calls on African leaders to do what is needed to provide their citizens with "jobs, good education, health care and other basic needs," the cardinal said.

Noting that migrants suffer tremendously and migration is "often associated with considerable societal and economic problems, both in the sending and the receiving countries," the African and German bishops said "there is a tendency to overlook the important positive contributions made by immigrants in the societies that receive them" as well as in their countries of origin, to which they often send remittances.

"As bishops we know that migrants also enrich the life of the church," they said in a joint statement issued April 1.

The bishops said they are "deeply concerned by human rights issues associated with the practice of protecting Europe's external borders" and "demand that asylum applications be admitted and reviewed in an appropriate manner."

Deportations "must follow humanitarian standards," they said.

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