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Francis chides world leaders on Syria, calls military intervention 'futile'

Dennis Coday | Sep. 5, 2013

Pursuing a military solution in Syria is "futile," Pope Francis said Thursday in a letter to the leaders of the Group of 20 gathered in St. Petersburg, Russia, and he chided world leaders for their inability to find a solution to avoid "the senseless massacre now unfolding."

The pope's letter, addressed to meeting host Russian President Vladimir Putin, said it was "regrettable that, from the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, one-sided interests have prevailed and in fact hindered the search for a solution."

Francis made "a heartfelt appeal" for the leaders "to overcome conflicting positions," "lay aside the futile pursuit of a military solution" and "to seek, with courage and determination, a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation of the parties, unanimously supported by the international community."

The G-20 brings together finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union as a forum to address issues of the global economy. Members are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

"The leaders of the G20 cannot remain indifferent" to the situation in Syria, "which has lasted far too long, and even risks bringing greater suffering to a region bitterly tested by strife and needful of peace," Francis wrote in the letter. "All governments have the moral duty to do everything possible to ensure humanitarian assistance to those suffering because of the conflict, both within and beyond the country's borders."

Francis has declared Saturday a day of "fasting and prayer for peace in Syria, the Middle East and throughout the world." He will lead prayers in St. Peter's Square from 7 to 11 p.m. Rome time.

At his general audience Wednesday, Francis invited all people of goodwill to "join in this moment, in their own places and ways" so that "a powerful cry for peace [may] go up from every land!"

Local dioceses, parishes and church groups from Manila, the Philippines, to Lubbock, Texas, are making plans for prayer events of their own.

The text of the Francis letter to the G-20 follows:

> To His Excellency
> Mr Vladimir PutinPresident of the Russian Federation
>
> "In the course of this year, you have the honour and the responsibility of presiding over the Group

of the twenty largest economies in the world. I am aware that the Russian Federation has participated in this group from the moment of its inception and has always had a positive role to play in the promotion of good governance of the world's finances, which have been deeply affected by the crisis of 2008.In today's highly interdependent context, a global financial framework with its own just and clear rules is required in order to achieve a more equitable and fraternal world, in which it is possible to overcome hunger, ensure decent employment and housing for all, as well as essential healthcare. Your presidency of the G20 this year has committed itself to consolidating the reform of the international financial organizations and to achieving a consensus on financial standards suited to today's circumstances. However, the world economy will only develop if it allows a dignified way of life for all human beings, from the eldest to the unborn child, not just for citizens of the G20 member states but for every inhabitant of the earth, even those in extreme social situations or in the remotest places.

From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world's peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself, as seen, for example, in the Millennium Development Goals. Unfortunately, the many armed conflicts which continue to afflict the world today present us daily with dramatic images of misery, hunger, illness and death. Without peace, there can be no form of economic development. Violence never begets peace, the necessary condition for development. The meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the twenty most powerful economies, with two-thirds of the world's population and ninety per cent of global GDP, does not have international security as its principal purpose. Nevertheless, the meeting will surely not forget the situation in the Middle East and particularly in Syria. It is regrettable that, from the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, one-sided interests have prevailed and in fact hindered the search for a solution that would have avoided the senseless massacre now unfolding. The leaders of the G20 cannot remain indifferent to the dramatic situation of the beloved Syrian people which has lasted far too long, and even risks bringing greater suffering to a region bitterly tested by strife and needful of peace. To the leaders present, to each and every one, I make a heartfelt appeal for them to help find ways to overcome the conflicting positions and to lay aside the futile pursuit of a military solution. Rather, let there be a renewed commitment to seek, with courage and determination, a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation of the parties, unanimously supported by the international community. Moreover, all governments have the moral duty to do everything possible to ensure humanitarian assistance to those suffering because of the conflict, both within and beyond the country's borders.

Mr President, in the hope that these thoughts may be a valid spiritual contribution to your meeting, I pray for the successful outcome of the G20's work on this occasion. I invoke an abundance of blessings upon the Summit in Saint Petersburg, upon the participants and the citizens of the member states, and upon the work and efforts of the 2013 Russian Presidency of the G20. While requesting your prayers, I take this opportunity to assure you, Mr President, of my highest consideration."

From the Vatican, 4 September 2013

(Signed)

Francis

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