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Pope urges business leaders to serve human dignity, common good

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Business leaders have the power and the duty to reduce widespread inequality and "social exclusion," ensuring that "humanity is served by wealth and not ruled by it," Pope Francis said in a message read at the opening of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The pope's message was read Tuesday by Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, at the meeting, which every year draws thousands of businesspeople, politicians and celebrities to a Swiss ski resort for discussions of global concerns. The 2014 meeting is to run through Saturday.

Business has played a "fundamental role" in recent improvements in "health care, education and communications" and reducing poverty for a "great number of people," Pope Francis wrote in the letter addressed to Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the forum. But he added that these same advances "often have led to a widespread social exclusion."

"The majority of the men and women of our time still continue to experience daily insecurity, often with dramatic consequences," the pope wrote. Insufficient concern for the "most frail, weak and vulnerable" has worsened the plight of refugees and the world's hungry.

Pope Francis wrote that he had chosen to use "dramatic" language in order to "affirm and to challenge the ability of this assembly to make a difference."

"Those who have demonstrated their aptitude for being innovative and for improving the lives of many people by their ingenuity and professional expertise can further contribute by putting their skills at the service of those who are still living in dire poverty," the pope wrote.

But if business leaders are to "serve more effectively the common good," Pope Francis wrote, they must adopt what Pope Benedict XVI called a "transcendent vision of the human person," as seen from the "perspective of eternal life."

Pope Francis also reiterated earlier calls for a "better distribution of wealth," job creation and an "integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality."

"The international business community can count on many men and women of great personal honesty and integrity, whose work is inspired and guided by high ideals of fairness, generosity and concern for the authentic development of the human family," the pope wrote. "I urge you to draw upon these great human and moral resources and to take up this challenge with determination and far-sightedness."

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