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## Pope at audience: "I express my closeness to the peoples of Turkey and Syria"

"My thoughts go to the peoples of Turkey and Syria who have been hard hit by the earthquake, which has caused thousands of deaths and injuries", the Pope said at the end of the Wednesday general audience, in which he retraced the steps of his recent journey to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. "With emotion I pray for them and express my closeness to these peoples, to the families of the victims and to all those who are suffering from this devastating calamity. I thank the relief workers and I encourage everyone to show solidarity with those territories, some of which have already been ravaged by a long war." Francis yet again extended his thoughts to the "martyred Ukraine": "Let us not forget the suffering of the Ukrainian people, with no electricity, no heating and at war."

The recent journey to Africa was inspired by "two dreams",

Francis said: "to visit the Congolese people, custodians of an immense country, the green heart of Africa: together with Amazonia, they are the two lungs of the world. A land rich in resources and bloodied by a war that never ends, because there is always someone to fan the flames. And to visit the South Sudanese people, in a pilgrimage of peace together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator General of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields: we went together to bear witness that it is possible, and a duty, to collaborate in diversity, especially if one shares faith in Jesus Christ", explained the Holy Father.

Africa is a continent that has been colonized, exploited, plundered",

Francis denounced: "the Congo is like a diamond, for her nature, her resources, and especially for her people; but this diamond has become a source of contention, of violence, and paradoxically of the impoverishment of the people", he said recounting the three days in Kinshasa: "It is a dynamic that is also found in other African regions, and which applies in general to the continent." "In the face of all this I said two words – Francis pointed out - The first is negative: **'Enough! Stop exploiting Africa!'** I have said several times that in the collective unconscious there is, 'Africa must be exploited': enough of this! I have said that. The second is positive: together, together with dignity, all together, and with mutual respect, together in the name of Christ, our hope, to go forward. Do not exploit, and go forward together!" "Say 'no' to violence, 'no' to resignation. Say 'yes' to reconciliation and to hope", was the central message during his meeting with the victims of the violence in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, "the region that has for years been torn apart by war between armed groups manoeuvred by economic and political interests." "People live in fear and insecurity", Francis noted, mentioning **"the shocking testimonies of some victims, especially women, who placed weapons and other instruments of death at the foot of the cross."** "They have suffered a great deal, and continue to suffer!", Francis added in unscripted remarks. He thus recalled the meeting with the representatives of the various charitable organisations present in the country, and summarised his address to them with the following words: "Aid yes, but development." Spiritual mediocrity, worldly comfort and superficiality "are temptations, I would say, that are universal for seminarians and priests", Francis added in unscripted remarks with regard to the meeting with the clergy: "There was an exciting moment with Congolese young people and catechists in the stadium", he pointed out: "It was like an immersion in the present, projected towards the future." It was "the culmination of a journey undertaken some years ago, when we gathered in Rome in 2019, with the South Sudanese leaders, to take on the commitment to overcome conflict and to build peace," the Pope said referring to the second part of his apostolic journey that took place

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in South Sudan with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of the Anglican Church Justin Welby, and the Moderator General of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields. “In 2019 there was a spiritual retreat here, in the Curia – Francis recalled departing from the written text - with all these politicians, with all these people aspiring to positions, some of them enemies, but they were all at the retreat. And this gave the strength to go forward.” “Unfortunately, the reconciliation process has not advanced much, and the nascent South Sudan is a victim of the old logic of power and rivalry, which produces war, violence, refugees and internally displaced persons”, the Pope denounced. “And this is shameful”, Francis added: “many so-called “civilized” countries offer aid to South Sudan, and this aid consists of weapons, weapons, weapons, to foment war. This is shameful.” Francis thus recalled the prayer meeting “held together with our Anglican brothers and those of the Church of Scotland”: “In a reality as highly conflictual as that of South Sudan, this sign is fundamental, and not to be taken for granted, because unfortunately there are those who abuse the name of God to justify violence and oppression”, Francis remarked.

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