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## Pope Francis: “Nothing is worth the life of a child”

3 Febbraio 2025



“Even today, too often the lives of millions of children are marked by poverty, war, lack of schooling, injustice and exploitation”, **Pope Francis** said in the opening address to members of the world leaders participating in the summit on children’s rights titled “Love them and protect them”, organized by the Pontifical Committee for World Children’s Day. At the end of the Summit, the pope announced that he will prepare “a letter, an Exhortation, I don’t know”, dedicated to children and a document that he will sign along with all participants. “Children and adolescents in poorer countries, or those torn apart by tragic conflicts, are forced to endure terrible trials”, though “nor is the more resource-rich world immune from injustice”: “Where, thank God, people do not suffer from war or hunger, there are problematic peripheries, where little ones are not infrequently vulnerable and suffer from problems that we cannot underestimate.” “To a much greater extent than in the past, schools and health services have to deal with children already tested by many difficulties, with anxious or depressed youngsters, and adolescents drawn to forms of aggression or self-harm”, Francis denounced: “a culture of

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efficiency looks upon childhood itself, like old age, as a “periphery” of existence.”

“What we have tragically seen almost every day in recent times, namely children dying beneath bombs, sacrificed to the idols of power, ideology, and nationalistic interests, is unacceptable”,

the Pope exclaimed: “**nothing is worth the life of a child**”, “to kill children is to deny the future”. “In some cases, minors themselves are forced to fight under the effect of drugs”: “Even in countries without war, violence between criminal gangs becomes just as deadly for children, and often leaves them orphaned and marginalized.” The pathological individualism of developed countries is also detrimental to children. Sometimes “they are mistreated or even put to death by the very people who should be protecting and nurturing them. They fall victim to quarrelling, social or mental distress and parental addictions.”

“Many children die as migrants at sea, in the desert or along the many routes of journeys undertaken out of desperate hope”,

Francis remarked: “Countless others succumb to a lack of medical care or various types of exploitation. All these situations are different, but they raise the same question: How is it possible that a child’s life should end like this? Surely this is unacceptable, and we must guard against becoming inured to this reality.”

“A childhood denied is a silent scream condemning the wrongness of the economic system, the criminal nature of wars, the lack of adequate medical care and schooling”, Francis said with

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reference to what international organizations describe as a “moral global crisis.” “We do not want this to become the new normal. We refuse to get used to it”, the Pope assured, denouncing certain practices in the media that “tend to make us insensitive.”

“We risk losing what is noblest in the human heart: mercy and compassion. **“Today, more than forty million children have been displaced by conflict and about a hundred million are homeless”**, the Pope said: “There is also the tragedy of child slavery”, Francis highlighted the dramatic figures: “some one hundred and sixty million children are victims of forced labour, trafficking, abuse and exploitation of all kinds, including compulsory marriages. There are millions of migrant children, sometimes with families but often alone. This phenomenon of unaccompanied minors is increasingly frequent and serious. Many other minors live in ‘limbo’ because they were not registered at birth.”

**“An estimated one hundred and fifty million “invisible” children have no legal existence”**,

The Pope went on to denounce: “This is an obstacle to their accessing education or health care, yet worse still, since they do not enjoy legal protection, they can easily be abused or sold as slaves. This actually happens! We can think of the young Rohingya children, who often struggle to get registered, or the ‘undocumented’ children at the border of the United States, those first victims of that exodus of despair and hope made by the thousands of people coming from the South towards the United States of America, and many others.” This history of oppression of children is constantly repeated: “I grew up with the stories of the First World War told by my grandfather, and this opened my eyes and heart to the horror of war.” For Bergoglio, “seeing things through the eyes of those who have lived through war is the best way to understand the inestimable value of life”:

**“Yet also listening to those children who today live in violence, exploitation or injustice serves to strengthen our “no” to war, to the throwaway culture of waste and profit, in which everything is bought and sold without respect.”**

“In the name of this throwaway mentality, in which the human being becomes all-powerful, unborn life is sacrificed through the murderous practice of abortion”, Francis denounced: “Abortion suppresses the life of children and cuts off the source of hope for the whole of society.” “How important it is to listen, for we need to realize that young children understand,

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remember and speak to us”, the Pope’s guidance to the participants in the Summit: “And with their looks and their silences, too, they speak to us. So let us listen to them!”

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