

Pope Francis in Africa visit says 'God is peace,' 'salaam'

by [Tonny Onyulo](#) in the [December 23, 2015](#) issue

Pope Francis ended a six-day trip to Africa in the war-torn Central Africa Republic with a call to end religious conflict.

“Together we must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence, especially violence perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God himself,” the pope said in Bangui, the capital. “God is peace, salaam.”

In the final part of his trip in late November—which also included time in Kenya and Uganda—the pope visited a mosque in a neighborhood that Bangui’s Muslims have been unable to leave for months because Christian militia members have surrounded it.

Francis spoke about the violence between Christians and Muslims that erupted when rebels ousted the Central African Republic’s president three years ago and continues to divide the country. Around 6,000 have died in the fighting, and thousands have been displaced.

“I want to thank him because he has preached peace,” said Nasra Yamashia, a mother of five who lives in the St. Joseph Mukasa refugee camp outside Bangui. “The fighters should also value the life of people and stop killings.”

Yamashia is a Muslim whose husband was killed by fighters from a pro-Christian militia that emerged after Islamic forces ousted the Central African Republic’s president.

Francis’s remarks dovetailed with themes he addressed in Kenya.

“Tribalism, it can destroy, it can mean having your hands hidden behind your back and having a stone in each hand to throw” at others, the pope told a group of Catholic youths in Nairobi. “Kenya is a young and vibrant nation. Cohesion, integration, and tolerance toward other people must be a primary goal.”

He also called for governments to distribute wealth in a way that curbs, rather than exacerbates, divisions between people.

“I encourage you to work with integrity and transparency for the common good, and to foster a spirit of solidarity at every level of society,” he said, speaking in the elegant surroundings of the Kenyan president’s official residence.

In Uganda, the pope toured a shrine that memorializes 19th-century Christian martyrs who were burned alive for their faith.

Hundreds of Ugandans signed a petition asking for Pope Francis to allow priests to marry. They also wanted Francis to be more critical of Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, who has been accused of seeking to rule the country like a dictator. — *USA Today*

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