

AFRICA

## Pope Francis to Push Climate Message on Africa Trip

Pontiff to visit countries hit hard by cyclones earlier this year



Pope Francis before boarding an airplane on his way to Maputo, Mozambique, on Wednesday. PHOTO: VATICAN MEDIA HANDOUT/SHUTTERSTOCK

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Pope Francis is set to arrive in southeastern Africa late Wednesday to begin a weeklong tour of one of the world's poorest regions—and one of the most vulnerable to climate change—as he seeks to push his environmentalist message.

His first stops will be Mozambique and the island of Madagascar, which were hit hard by catastrophic cyclones this year that killed more than 1,000 people across the region. He will then travel to Mauritius.

The pope has been a major spokesman for the movement against climate change since 2015, when he wrote a papal encyclical that called for a reduction in carbon emissions.

His climate advocacy is linked to his concern for the poor and economic justice, said Francesca de Gasparis, executive director of the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute. “He looks at issues such as climate change from a justice perspective. Those who have least contributed to the causes of climate change also are often the most affected,” she said.

Mozambique and Madagascar are among the countries most vulnerable and least prepared for climate change, according to the University of Notre Dame’s Global Adaptation Initiative.

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Cyclone Idai killed more than 1,000 people across southeastern Africa in March as floodwaters and heavy winds swept away houses, hospitals, schools and roads.

Some 75,000 Mozambicans remain in temporary camps, unable to rebuild their homes, while around 1.7 million people out of a total population of 30 million don’t have enough food to survive, the United States Agency for International Development said in a report last month.

The pontiff is expected to mourn the cyclones’ victims and thank local church movements, which were at the center of aid efforts following Idai and Cyclone Kenneth, which made landfall in April.

Mozambique and Madagascar are two of the poorest countries in the world, respectively ranked 180 and 161 out of 189 nations on the United Nations’ Human Development Index. On Sunday in Madagascar, the pope will visit and offer a prayer for workers at a nongovernmental organization founded by an Argentine priest that offers work and aid to some 30,000 people in 18 villages.

Catholics are a minority of roughly one third in all three of the countries the pope will visit, so interfaith dialogue, one of his signature issues, will be an important feature. On Thursday, his first full day in Africa, he will meet with Muslim and Hindu youth in Mozambique’s capital, Maputo.

The beginning of his trip comes three days after the latest papal document on the environment was published, in which Pope Francis called for more sustainable consumption: “Too many of us act like tyrants with regard to creation! Let us make an effort to change and to adopt more simple and respectful lifestyles!”

The pope is also expected to celebrate last month’s peace agreement in Mozambique, still recovering from the effects of a long civil war whose formal end in 1992 was achieved with the help of Catholic Church intermediaries.



A worker paints a cross outside the Andohalo Cathedral in Antananarivo, Madagascar, on Wednesday. PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

The trip also comes before a three-week meeting of bishops at the Vatican focusing on the challenges of the Amazon region. It will be the largest-scale event of his pontificate to have a strong focus on environmental questions.

Shortly before the Amazon synod will come the United Nations' Climate Action Summit in New York, where governments from around the globe are supposed to present updated plans for cutting their greenhouse-gas emissions by 45% over the next decade before reducing net emissions to zero by 2050.

In his message to the faithful on Sunday, Pope Francis urged governments to stand by their commitments for the New York summit and limit the rise in the world's average temperatures to no more than 1.5 degree Celsius. That, most scientists say, is needed to contain catastrophic weather events and sea-level rises.

The pope's call prompted U.N. Secretary General António Guterres to tweet on Monday: "Thank you Your Holiness Pope Francis for your call to #ClimateAction. We need bolder action and stronger political will to win the battle against the climate emergency."

Ms. de Gasparis said the pope's advocacy is likely to resonate strongly in southern Africa. "In our region faith leaders are often some of the most respected leaders," she said. "We very much appreciate when faith leaders are able to combine the science...with their spiritual connection."

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