

Pope Francis Slams Corrupt Political and Business Leaders in Passionate Sermon

Pope Francis, ending his visit to Mozambique, on Friday scolded political and business leaders in the resource-rich but poor East African country who allow themselves to be corrupted by outsiders.

On his last day in the country, Francis visited a hospital for HIV-AIDS sufferers run by the Sant' Egidio community and then said a mass for some 60,000 of people in Maputo's national stadium.

At the hospital and in his homily, Francis spoke of all four of the main themes of the trip to this country as well as Madagascar and Mauritius – peace, poverty, corruption and environmental protection.

“Mozambique is a land of abundant natural and cultural riches, yet paradoxically, great numbers of its people live below the poverty level,” Francis said in the stadium, in an area of the capital where many people live in shantytowns with houses of corrugated metal roofs.

At the AIDS hospital, the pope saw a cross made of wood and shards of metal from the collapsed roof of the home of an elderly woman.

According to the U.N. World Food Programme, 80% of Mozambique's population of about 30 million cannot afford the minimum costs for an adequate diet.

“At times it seems that those who approach with the alleged desire to help have other interests. Sadly, this happens with brothers and sisters of the same land, who let themselves be

corrupted. It is very dangerous to think that this is the price to be paid for foreign aid," Francis said.

BILLION-DOLLAR SCANDAL

Mozambique ranks in the lowest quarter of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

While the pope did not give any specific examples of corruption, Mozambique is still struggling to recover from the impact of a \$2 billion debt scandal, which saw hundreds of millions of dollars in borrowing guaranteed by the Mozambique government disappear.

The money was borrowed ostensibly to develop shipyards, maritime security and a tuna fishing venture, but U.S. authorities now say the projects were an elaborate front for a bribe and kickback scheme. Boats acquired for the projects meanwhile are rusting in harbors across Mozambique.

Criminal and civil court cases related to the scandal and spanning three continents have ensnared international investment bank Credit Suisse, which helped arrange the loans, three of its former bankers, a former finance minister and the former Mozambique president's son.

Credit Suisse says it continues to cooperate with regulatory and enforcement authorities in connection with multiple investigations related to the Mozambique maritime transactions. It has said the bankers hid their misconduct from the bank. Mozambique has charged 20 people over the affair and is suing Credit Suisse and others.

Mozambique, already one of the world's most impoverished countries, is still on the hook for the loans, some of which the government did not disclose. When it admitted to the undisclosed borrowing in 2016 it prompted donors such as the International Monetary Fund to cut off support, triggering a currency collapse and debt crisis.

Francis also spoke earlier of his concern over the environmental degradation in Africa, some it caused by rampant deforestation and extraction industries.

He said that assisting the poor could help put people in touch in touch with the earth, which is also vulnerable, and suffers from “symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life ... the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”

Deforestation, along with soil erosion, made Mozambique more vulnerable when two cyclones hit the country this year.

According to the World Bank, Mozambique has lost 8 million hectares of forest, about the size of Portugal, since the 1970s.