

The Devil Is Punishing Mexico With Great Fury, Says Pope Francis

The devil is punishing Mexico with criminal violence, Pope Francis said, just a few weeks after the Mexican government complained that the Pontiff had stigmatized the country as a breeding ground for gangland chaos.

"I think the devil is punishing Mexico with great fury," the 78-year-old Francis told Mexican television in an interview broadcast late on Thursday when discussing the disappearance and apparent massacre of 43 Mexican students last year.

Arguing that the devil was angry with Mexico for its Christian faith, Francis said "everyone had to put their back into resolving" the criminal malaise afflicting the country.

Mexico, a strongly Roman Catholic nation, has been wracked by drug violence in the past decade. More than 100,000 people have died in clashes between Mexican drug gangs and their battles with security forces over the last eight years.

Last month, a spat flared up when a private email sent by the Pope was published in which he expressed concern about the "Mexicanization" of Argentina with drug gang violence.

Mexico quickly sent a letter of protest to the Vatican, which said it had not meant to offend the country.

"Clearly it is a technical term. It has nothing to do with the dignity of Mexico. Like when we talk about Balkanization, neither the Serbs, nor Macedonians nor Croats get angry," Francis said, referring to his use of the word Mexicanization.

The disappearance of the 43 trainee teachers in the southwestern city of Iguala in late September sparked international condemnation of the security situation in

Mexico.

Mexico said the young men were abducted by corrupt police, handed over to a local drug gang, then incinerated, triggering President Enrique Peña Nieto's deepest political crisis.

Francis also said in the interview he believes his pontificate will be short and that he would be ready to resign like his predecessor rather than rule for life.

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