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Pope at the UN: 5 things Francis thinks are wrong with the world

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Pope to leaders: 'Solemn commitments are not enough' 02:31

Story highlights

Francis, who is in New York as part of a weeklong visit to the United States, is the fifth pope to address the United Nations

He argued for a series of "sacred rights," including labor, land and lodging

(CNN)—In a sweeping address to the United Nations on Friday, [Pope Francis](#) presented himself as a champion of the poor and dispossessed, urging world leaders to adopt concrete solutions to combat widespread poverty and environmental destruction.

Francis, who is in New York as part of a weeklong visit to the United States, is the fifth pope to address the United Nations, and his speech followed a familiar papal formula.

Poor countries don't have a real presence at the U.N., and poor people don't have a voice in international aid projects, he said

First, the Pope laid out his moral vision for a more just world, arguing for a series of "sacred rights," including labor, land and lodging.

from drug trafficking to the nuclear arms race and the rise of an "all-powerful elite" that hoards wealth and resources.

Adopting the urgent tone of a disappointed prophet, he then listed the most pressing problems facing humanity --

"In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged," Francis said.

Lastly, the Pope offered ideas for world leaders to consider.

Here's exactly what the Pope thinks is wrong with the world, followed by his suggestions for fixing them:

Powerful elites rule the world

Poor countries don't have a real presence in the United Nations, and poor people don't have a voice in international aid programs and projects, the Pope said.

"To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty," he said, "we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny."

[Pope Francis criticizes 'dictators' and 'tyrants'](#)

Talk, talk, talk

World leaders seem not to realize that while they hedge, real people suffer, Francis said. When they finally do find a solution, it is often imposed without thought to local realities.

"In wars and conflicts, there are individual persons, our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die," he said, "human beings who are easily discarded when our only response is to draw up lists of problems, strategies and disagreements."

[What Pope has said about key issues facing the church](#)

Using the United Nations for ill



While praising the U.N. as an important instrument for good, the Pope also noted that certain countries have been able to manipulate the international body to block urgent action.

Noting the conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Sudan, Francis said some world leaders have used the U.N. not to solve problems, but "as a means of masking spurious intentions."

"These realities should serve as a grave summons to an examination of conscience on the part of those charged

48 photos: Pope Francis in the United States

with the conduct of international affairs."

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'United by fear and distrust'

Nuclear weapons are poor instruments of peace, the Pope said, frankly dismissing the idea that no one will use bombs if everybody has them.

"An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction -- and possibly the destruction of all mankind," he said, "are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as nations united by fear and distrust."

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No checks, no balances

World leaders can draw up all the treaties and programs they want, the Pope said. But if there are no ways of enforcing decisions, they remain useless white papers.

"The number and complexity of the problems require that we possess technical instruments of verification," Francis said.

But even those "instruments" can become bureaucratic mazes in which real solutions recede into a hazy horizon, he said.

"We cannot permit ourselves to postpone 'certain agendas' for the future," the Pope said.

"The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of worldwide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need."



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The Pope's solutions

Popes don't often offer concrete solutions global problems. But Francis is no ordinary pope. On Friday, he proposed three specific paths to a more "sustainable development of countries."

- **An international justice league:** In previous speeches, the Pope has lamented that poor countries are plundered for their natural resources, with no legal means to fight back.

On Friday, he proposed the creation of a "juridical system" for regulating claims and limiting power.

- **Mother Earth has rights:** This summer, Pope Francis traveled to Bolivia and Ecuador, two of the few countries that grant "rights of nature" -- protecting the air, trees and water.

On Friday, he backed the idea of "right of the environment," for two reasons.

1. Any harm to the Earth also harms humanity.

2. Every living creature has intrinsic value, beauty and is interdependent with other forms of life.

- **Beyond the dotted lines:** As Francis noted, the U.N. began its summit for sustainable development Friday, and in December, world leaders will gather for a summit on climate change.

The Pope's speech on Friday, [as well as his eco-encyclical](#), aimed to influence those agreements, Francis has said.

"Solemn commitments, however, are not enough, even though they are a necessary step toward solutions," he said.

What the world needs, Francis argued, is a renewed sense of sacrifice for the common good and solidarity between the rich and poor, races and religions, the powerful and powerless.

[Pope Francis: 'Revolution' needed to combat climate change](#)

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