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Pope to conference on peace: global economy treats people unfairly

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Pope Francis criticized the global economic system Thursday, telling an international group celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* that the system is "inhuman" and treats people unfairly.

At a meeting organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the pope spoke with particular force regarding the status of the world's migrants, calling an accident earlier in the day off Italy's coast "shameful."

The accident, which happened near the coast of the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, caused the death of at least 94 people from North Africa seeking to migrate across the Mediterranean. Francis visited the island July 8 on his first visit as pope outside Rome.

The pope spoke Thursday to a meeting of experts -- including those from Catholic universities, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the African Union -- the pontifical council is hosting Wednesday through Friday.

The experts are discussing the modern-day implications of the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, a document written by Pope John XXIII and seen as a high point in Catholic involvement in the political system because of its denunciation of the system of nuclear deterrence.

"Are the words justice and solidarity found only in our dictionary, or are we all working to realize them?" Francis asked the group, which is meeting in the 16th-century Clementine Hall.

Pacem in Terris shows "there can be no real peace and harmony if we fail to work for a more just" world, the pope said. He emphasized the need for all people to access water, food, shelter, health care and education.

Near the end of his remarks, the pope looked up from his prepared text, referred to the accident near Lampedusa and said, "Such tragedies cannot be repeated."

Cardinal Peter Turkson, a native Ghanaian who serves as president of the pontifical council, found the pope's remarks "emotional," he told *NCR* after the pope's remarks.

"[The pope] knows today that a group trying to cross over from North Africa drowned," Turkson said. "It's a shame that at this point in time, we still have people drowning in the Mediterranean because they're looking for a better experience in life."

The pope's address to the council meeting comes after the announcement Monday that Pope John XXIII will formally become a saint April 27, along with Pope John Paul II. John XXIII was pope from 1958 to 1963; John Paul II, from 1978 to 2005.

Thursday was the second day of the council's meeting on the 1963 encyclical.

The morning session saw addresses from Turkson; the co-presidents of the global Catholic peace group Pax Christi International; the secretary-general of the World Council of Churches; and Joseph Deiss, a Swiss economist who is a former secretary-general of the United Nations General Assembly.

The function of the U.N. was a topic of several of the discussions -- Pope John XXIII said in his 1963 letter that many of the global problems of peace and justice would not be solved unless there was a public authority with a "world-wide sphere of activity."

"Now, we come to the today of 2013," Turkson said in his remarks, which opened the morning session. "Fifty years later, these powers are not yet fully established. The U.N. fulfills aspects of such a body, but it requires further development."

The Pax Christi co-presidents, American laywoman Marie Dennis and South African Bishop Kevin Dowling, focused on the continuing situation of war faced by many across the world.

"Unfortunately ... we see now that the optimism in *Pacem in Terris* was premature," said Dowling, bishop of Rustenburg, South Africa.

Many human rights "remain in dire need of urgent attention many years later and war is hardly a thing of the past," he said.

Reflecting on *Pacem in Terris*' call for a ban on nuclear weapons, Dowling said nuclear deterrence had "become a state of affairs rather than a temporary step toward global zero."

Dowling also called on Catholic moral theologians to reconsider their use of the just war theory, an ethical formulation that outlines a number of criteria that must be met before a war or military action can be considered ethical.

The theory "seems to suggest that war can be justified rather than that war is virtually unjustifiable in our times," Dowling said.

Deiss, who led the U.N. assembly in its 2010-11 session, told the Vatican meeting that while the U.N. may sometimes be seen as an imperfect instrument, it "has undoubtedly contributed to making the world a better place."

"Even though the U.N. machinery might be burdensome and rusty, where there is political willingness to make the best use of the instrument, breakthroughs are possible," he said.

Deiss also suggested a number of reforms of the U.N. Security Council, a group that has representative members of 15 nations. Five members -- Russia, the United STates, China, France, and the U.K. -- are permanent, while the other 10 are elected to serve two-year terms.

As proposals to expand the number of permanent members have failed in recent years, Deiss suggested the U.N. Charter could be modified to allow nonpermanent members to be re-elected, which is currently prohibited.

Nonpermanent members, he said, could then become *de facto* permanent members but "would have the accountability" of needing to be elected to hold their posts.

Pope Francis spoke to the pontifical council meeting Thursday while taking a break from a meeting he called this week with eight cardinals from around the world tasked in April with helping the pope consider reforms to the Vatican bureaucracy.

The group has been meeting since Tuesday and is expected to wrap up Thursday afternoon. The pope travels Friday with members of the cardinals' group to Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis of Assisi, his papal namesake.

At a short press briefing Thursday, Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi said the pope and cardinals are considering reforms which could take "significant time" to develop. The spokesman has previously said there will be no formal reports of the meetings' discussions or possible points of decisions.

The pontifical council continues its anniversary celebration on the 1963 encyclical Friday with sessions on interreligious dialogue and Christian persecution around the world. Participants will also focus on the continuing economic crisis in Europe.

Panels include several former Vatican ambassadors, a former minister in the Pakistani government, and a number of noted academics from around the world.

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