Vatican
Vatican News
A medium-sized group of people poses for a group photo in front of a marble wall

Participants at a conference on colonialism pose for a photo with Cardinal Peter Turkson, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, standing in the bottom row second from left, outside the Casina Pio IV at the Vatican March 31, 2023. (CNS photo/Courtesy Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js



Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — April 3, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Parliaments and legislatures should have quotas to include Indigenous people and members of displaced ethnic groups in political processes, Pope Francis said.

"Representative bodies are inconceivable when only the dominant power occupies spaces," he said, suggesting the need to establish a quota system that "reintegrates" historically marginalized groups "into the decision-making space that has been taken away from them."

The pope's comments were contained a message to the participants at a conference hosted by the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences March 30-31, titled "Colonization, Decolonization and Neocolonialism from the Perspective of Justice and the Common Good."

Francis was scheduled to speak at the conference March 31, but he was in the hospital undergoing treatment for bronchitis. He was discharged April 1.

In his message, the pope wrote that even "subtle" forms of colonialism that exploit nations and groups through force or political and cultural influence are a crime.

"No power -- political, economic, ideological -- is authorized to determine unilaterally the identity of a nation or social group," he wrote. "There is no chance for peace in a world that discards and oppresses populations in order to plunder" their resources.

The pope said that while some places remain colonized in the traditional sense of the word, economic and ideological colonialism is much more common.

Colonialism, he said, "camouflages and hides itself, making its detection and neutralization difficult."

Advertisement

As an example, Francis mentioned his February trip to Congo, a country that has been independent for more than 70 years but "today is subject to actions that, on the one hand guarantee it certain benefits, and on the other lead to the exploitation of its resources."

Although Congo has great natural wealth and holds about 70% of the world's cobalt -- a precious metal used in energy technologies, such as batteries for electric vehicles -- nearly 62% of its population lived on less than $2.15 a day in 2022, according to the World Bank.

Similar situations, often linked to a country's geopolitical situation, can be found in "many countries and regions in the world," the pope said.

But he also warned against what he called "ideological colonialism," which attempts to "eradicate (a people's) traditions, history and religious ties."

Those elements that form a group's identity "give meaning to decisions about what is just and good."

Francis repeated his apology for the "actions of some believers that contributed in a direct or indirect way to the processes of political and territorial domination of various peoples of America and Africa."

The pope issued a similar apology to members of Canada's Indigenous communities at the Vatican in April 2022 and again during his trip to Canada in July that same year, saying he was "deeply sorry" for the ways in which "many Christians supported the colonizing mentality of the powers that oppressed the Indigenous peoples."