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A stamp marked with Citta del Vaticano shows an illustration of Pope Francis of Francis leadin

A commemorative stamp created for World Youth Day 2023 and released by the Vatican May 11, 2023, depicts an image of Pope Francis with young people that resembles the "Padrão dos Descobrimentos" (Monument of the Discoveries) statue in Lisbon, Portugal. (CNS photo/Courtesy Vatican philatelic office)



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The Vatican has pulled from circulation a World Youth Day stamp of Pope Francis with young people in an image that resembles propaganda from Portugal's former

dictatorship.

According to Radio Renascença, the radio station of the Patriarchate of Lisbon and the Portuguese bishops' conference, a Holy See official confirmed May 18 that the stamp had been removed from circulation but did not provide further explanation.

The stamp, which was advertised May 11 by the Vatican philatelic office, depicts Francis leading a group of young people toward the World Youth Day 2023 logo and mimics the statue of "Padrão dos Descobrimentos" (Monument of the Discoveries) in Lisbon, a statue built during Portugal's conservative dictatorship.

Radio Renascença reported that the stamp "raised controversies in some sectors of the Portuguese church" due to its resemblance to nationalistic propaganda produced by Portugal's dictatorship in the mid-20th century. It had been scheduled to enter circulation May 16.

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The statue, which stands on the banks of the Tagus River in Lisbon, is thought to romanticize Portuguese exploration and colonization. With a giant cross in the center, the statue is lined with figures of explorers, including Vasco da Gama and St. Francis Xavier looking out to sea.

In its presentation of the stamp, the Vatican said that just as Henry the Navigator guided his crew to the discovery of the New World, the design shows Pope Francis guiding young people and the church and was meant to represent "the barque of Peter in the discovery of what lies beyond the horizons."

The Vatican postal service originally expected to produce 450,000 copies of the 3.10-euro stamp.