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Pope Francis speaks to young people representing different faiths, bishops and civil leaders at the closing session of the Mediterranean Meetings in Marseille, France, Sept. 23. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Francis on Sept. 23 blasted those who seek to weaponize the issue of migration by "fueling people's fears" through "alarmist propaganda," and called for countries and individuals around the Mediterranean to reexamine both their policies and attitudes toward asylum seekers.

"Those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for welcome," the pope said on his second day here in the storied French port city, where he traveled to address a major summit on migration convened by Catholic bishops and young people from more than 30 countries.

Ahead of the pope's visit, a new wave of North African migrant arrivals in Italy earlier this month sparked a renewed debate in Europe over migration, with France — the pope's host country for this visit — refusing to take in any new arrivals.

During his first day here, on Sept. 22, the pope issued a blunt warning against what he described as the "fanaticism of indifference" toward the current crisis and said it was a duty to welcome the new migrants.



Pope Francis is welcomed by French President Emmanuel Macron as he arrives at the Pharo Palace for the closing session of the Mediterranean Meetings in Marseille, France, Sept. 23. Francis was scheduled to meet privately with Macron later in the day. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

As the pope closed out the migration summit on Saturday, he attempted to offer a broad roadmap for the future, warning against being overwhelmed by momentary apprehension and to focus on long-term solutions.

"As for the emergency, the phenomenon of migration is not so much a short-term urgency, always good for fueling alarmist propaganda, but a reality of our times, a process that involves three continents around the Mediterranean and that must be governed with wise foresight," said the pope.

In an extensive 35-minute speech, the pope called on European countries to open their doors to people in need and to assimilate new arrivals into their society, especially through legal channels, while also enhancing their cooperation with the countries of origin of migrants.

"Merely crying 'enough!' is to close our eyes; attempting now to 'save ourselves' will turn into tragedy tomorrow," he warned. "Future generations will thank us if we were able to create the conditions for a necessary integration."

While the pope acknowledged that this is not a process without difficulties, he also said it is the only valid response for people who profess a commitment to human dignity.

Integration of migrants is key, said the pope, "not evicting them."

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Prior to his arrival here in France, the pope faced fierce criticism from far-right politicians who said that the Argentine-born pope had no business weighing in on Europe's migration problem.

But in his remarks Saturday, Francis seemed to offer a thinly-veiled reply to those critics.

"This situation is not a novelty of recent years, and this pope who came from the other side of the world is not the first to warn of it with urgency and concern," the pope said to applause. "The church has been speaking about it in heartfelt tones for more than 50 years."

While French Catholics are sharply divided over migration — with some notable figures alleging that it presents a threat to French society and Western Civilization — Francis borrowed their own vocabulary to address those concerns head on.

"History is challenging us to make a leap of conscience in order to prevent a shipwreck of civilization," he said. "For the future will not lie in being closed, which is a return to the past, a turnaround in the journey of history."

Pope Francis pauses before a memorial dedicated to sailors and migrants lost in the Mediterra

Pope Francis pauses before a memorial dedicated to sailors and migrants lost in the Mediterranean Sea in Marseille, France, Sept. 22. (CNS/Vatican Media)

And in a country where some conservative Catholics have lamented that the pope has spoken more often about migration than abortion or euthanasia — particularly

as the current government is on the verge of considering legislation that would legalize physician assisted suicide — Francis sought to widen his appeal by illustrating the interconnectedness of these issues.

"Who listens to the groaning of our isolated elderly brothers and sisters, who, instead of being appreciated, are pushed aside, under the false pretenses of a supposedly dignified and 'sweet' death that is more 'salty' than the waters of the sea?'' the pope asked.

"Who thinks of the unborn children, rejected in the name of a false right to progress, which is instead a retreat into the selfish needs of the individual?" he continued. "Who looks with compassion beyond their own shores to hear the cry of pain rising from North Africa and the Middle East?"

"We need to start again," the pope pleaded, "from the often silent cry of the least among us, not from the more fortunate ones who have no need of help yet still raise their voices."

French President Emmanuel Macron, some 70 Catholic prelates and a mix of political leaders attended the pope's remarks at the Mediterranean summit, where the pope said his words were meant to challenge the consciences of both institutions and individuals alike.

"The commitment of institutions alone is not enough, we need a jolt of conscience to say 'no' to lawlessness and 'yes' to solidarity, which is not a drop in the ocean, but the indispensable element for purifying its waters," Francis said.

Following his address, the pope will meet privately with Macron. He will then celebrate a Mass at Marseille's major soccer stadium that is expected to draw a crowd of over 50,000, prior to returning to Rome in the evening, where an in-flight press conference is expected.

This story appears in the **Pope Francis in Marseille** feature series. View the full series.