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Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, is greeted at the Saint Jean nonprofit health center in Cotonou, Benin, during his trip to the West African nation Jan. 17-20, 2024. During his visit to the health center Jan. 18, Czerny met with the staff who provide much needed medical services for the people of the tiny African country neighboring Nigeria on the east, Togo and Burkina Faso on the west. (OSV News/courtesy Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development)

Carol Glatz

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One out of four people living in Lebanon is a refugee, and the majority of children born in refugee camps are unregistered at birth, said Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The challenges facing refugees and those who host them are enormous, he told Vatican News Feb. 18 ahead of a trip to Lebanon Feb. 19-23.

"There is a lot of insecurity, and it is a quite terrible fact that the majority of children born in camps are not registered. So many minors are undocumented and, therefore, vulnerable to human trafficking and child labor," he said.

Lebanese Cardinal Bechara Rai, patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church, invited Czerny to visit the country to see firsthand the efforts of the local church, "especially after the war that forced a million people to flee," Czerny said.

While Israel has been fighting the Lebanon-based militant group, Hezbollah, since 2023 after the militants launched rocket attacks against Israel, Israel began a wave of airstrikes on targets in southern and eastern Lebanon, bordering Syria in September 2024 until a ceasefire went into effect in late November.

According to the U.N. refugee agency, at least 1.3 million people in Lebanon have been displaced as of November 2024 all while Lebanon hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and more than 11,000 refugees of other nationalities.

During his trip, the cardinal will meet with migrants, displaced persons and refugees receiving assistance from Caritas and the Jesuit Refugee Service.

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"It is important to bring the Holy Father's closeness to the refugees and all those who represent them," he said.

"It is also important to make a gesture of thanks and support to the Lebanese people who proportionately bear the greatest burden of any country in the world," he said. "One in four residents in Lebanon is a refugee. This is an example for a world that tends toward xenophobia."

The cardinal will meet with young people engaged in peace-building and visit a school with students of different faiths. He will also meet with Lebanon's Grand Mufti, the spiritual leader of Lebanese Muslims.

"It brings me joy to know that Lebanon is a country of dialogue where there are projects, which I will visit, where Muslims and Catholics are working together to address challenges and difficulties," he said. "I think it is a beautiful example of fraternity in action."

Czerny will also pray at the port of Beirut to remember those killed and injured by a massive chemical blast in 2020. At least 218 people died, more than 7,000 people were injured and an estimated 300,000 people were left homeless.

The cardinal said the message he will be bringing to everyone he meets will be "that the Holy Father remembers, prays, stands in solidarity and sends his affection to Lebanon."