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Pope Leo XIV speaks to journalists aboard a flight on his way to Luanda, Angola, April 18, 202

Pope Leo XIV speaks to journalists aboard a flight on his way to Luanda, Angola, April 18, 2026. On the flight from Cameroon to Angola, the pope pushed back against a media narrative that has pitted him against President Donald Trump since the start of his 11-day apostolic journey to Africa. (OSV News/Luca Zennaro, pool via Reuters)



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Pope Leo XIV again waded into the media storm that has consumed him since departing for his 11-day tour of Africa, stating that his comments cannot be cast as a rebuke of President Donald Trump.

"There has been a certain narrative that has not been accurate in all of its aspects," he told reporters aboard the papal plane en route to Angola April 18. He criticized media coverage that framed his comments in Cameroon as if he were "trying to debate again the president, which is not in my interest at all."

Leo specifically called out the coverage of his April 16 meeting for peace in Bamenda in northwestern Cameroon, in which he passionately declared that "the world is being ravaged by a handful of tyrants."

That speech, the pope said, "was prepared two weeks ago, well before the president had ever commented on myself and the message of peace that I am promoting."

The evening before the pope left Rome for his dizzying tour through the African continent, Trump called the pope "weak on crime and terrible for foreign policy" in a post on Truth Social, writing that he is "not a fan of Pope Leo."

In an extremely rare instance of a pope directly commenting on the media coverage surrounding him, Leo told reporters that "much of what has been written since then has been more commentary on commentary, trying to interpret what has been said."

Instead, the pope said, "I primarily come to Africa as pastor, as head of the Catholic Church to be with, to celebrate with, to encourage and accompany, all of the Catholics throughout Africa."

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After Trump's initial post, the pope said he had "no fear of the Trump administration," but he had since made no explicit reference to the president or the United States.

Trump, however, had continued to comment publicly on his disdain for Leo and falsely claimed the pope had advocated for Iran to have a nuclear weapon. Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic, called into question the pope's understanding on Catholic teaching around war, and House Speaker Mike Johnson said the pope warranted Trump's attack because he "waded into political waters."

Though rare for a pope to publicly discuss a particular political leader, Leo has now done so twice within a week.

The pope arrived in Luanda, Angola, April 18 to begin a three-day visit to the country before continuing to Equatorial Guinea to complete his tour through the continent.

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