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Pope Leo XIV receives the offertory gifts as he celebrates Mass at Bamenda International Airp

Pope Leo XIV receives the offertory gifts as he celebrates Mass at Bamenda International Airport in Cameroon April 16, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risolutii)



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As the dust begins to settle following Pope Leo XIV's April 15-18 visit to Cameroon, church leaders in the Central African nation believe the pontiff's journey has created a "kairos" moment of grace in a country longing for peace.

Arriving in Cameroon, the pope faced a country grappling with Boko Haram violence, regional refugee crises and a deadly separatist conflict in its English-speaking regions that has killed more than 6,500 and displaced over 500,000.

The crisis escalated in 2016 when teachers and lawyers from the two regions took to the streets to protest the disproportionate use of French in Anglophone schools and courts. The government's hardline response fueled the rise of a separatist movement that took up arms to secede and establish a new nation called Ambazonia.

Previous efforts toward peace, including the 2019 Major National Dialogue organized by the government, have yielded little progress.

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Despite these challenges, church leaders see the pope's visit as a turning point. In an interview with OSV News, Bishop George Nkuo of Kumbo said the pontiff's arrival provided a rare, God-given window for the nation to begin healing.

"I am convinced the Holy Father's visit and his call for peace touched everyone, including separatist fighters and government officials," Nkuo told OSV News.

While separatists announced a temporary ceasefire to allow the pope to come and go safely, Nkuo interprets the gesture as a sign that people are getting exhausted by the war. He explained that the temporary peace was a hopeful indication that even those immersed deeply in the conflict are yearning for change.

Pope Leo XIV embraces a girl during his pastoral visit to Bamenda, Cameroon April 16, 2026.T

Pope Leo XIV embraces a girl during his pastoral visit to Bamenda, Cameroon April 16, 2026.That day the pontiff attended a Meeting for Peace and celebrated Mass. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

"The Holy Father's visit to Cameroon was a unique moment. For once, the whole country halted, revealing a deep sense of joy and a longing for peace and justice," the cleric said.

He urged the nation to "seize this fleeting opportunity to turn that temporary spiritual unity into a permanent political and social reality."

The highlight of the April 15-18 stop in Cameroon of the pope's 11-day visit to Africa was the pope's visit to Bamenda, in the heart of the conflict zone. Addressing Catholics at St. Joseph's Cathedral, the pope was met with enthusiasm after declaring, "I am here to proclaim peace."

Celebrating Mass for 20,000 people at Bamenda's airport, he urged hope rooted in faith.

"This is the moment to change, to transform the story of this country," he said. "The time has come, today and not tomorrow."

Nkuo emphasized that addressing the grievances of English-speaking Cameroonians requires an honest confrontation with historical truths and a humble admission of past injustices.

"We may not return to the old landscape, but we must find a way for people to live in harmony," Nkuo said.

Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowds as he rides in the popemobile among the faithful as he arri

Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowds as he rides in the popemobile among the faithful as he arrives outside Japoma Stadium in Douala, Cameroon, April 17, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

The "old landscape" he refers to is the state structure adopted after independence. The French-speaking part of the country gained independence in January 1960 followed by the English-speaking part in October 1961, which they obtained by joining the already independent French Cameroon. The two initially agreed to a federation of two co-equal states, but a contested referendum in 1972 replaced the federation with a unitary state.

Since then, English-speaking populations have viewed the centralization of power as an attempt to assimilate them and erase their culture.

"I don't have the full roadmap, but even amidst this crisis, it is possible to find a positive solution."

Archbishop Andrew Nkea of Bamenda, speaking to Vatican News, echoed the need for action.

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As president of the bishops' conference of Cameroon, Nkea stressed that the aftermath of the visit is more important than the event itself.

"When the pope comes to a place, it is an event ... the pope has come and gone. He has given speeches and messages. We have all clapped, we are all happy."

"What next?" Nkea asked.

"That question is very important for all of us. I think that the whole country has to sit down and digest all those messages that the pope brought," he said, adding the pope's visit "was a tremendous blessing," and "we have already started seeing the signs of peace."

Bishop Michael Bibi of Buéa also warned against the temptation to return to violence.

"Violence only begets violence," he stated. "If we continue to fight, if we continue to kill each other, it is not going to bring stability," he told OSV News.

Simon Fobi Nchinda Simon, a former opposition member of Parliament, warned that the moral momentum generated by the Holy Father must be converted into a structured ceasefire and negotiations to prevent the two regions from sliding back into violence.

He warned against "performative dialogue" and called for concrete confidence-building measures, including the release of prisoners and detainees linked to the crisis. He said a long-term political resolution should be built upon an Anglophone-Francophone agreement driven by constitutional reform.

For Bibi, "What the church has to continue to do is to bear witness to the Gospel message. When the opportunity is given, we must carry out concrete actions that help bring Cameroonians together and restore peace to our society."

Nkea further suggested that the church and civil society must establish committees to facilitate dialogue, specifically aiming to bring separatists in the bush and the diaspora to the table with the government.

"We have to make sure that the words of the pope don't get wasted," he added.

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