

Pope, U.N. head meet, discuss crises in Syria, Korean peninsula

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Apr. 9, 2013
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Recognizing the important role each other plays on the global stage, Pope Francis and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met Tuesday at the Vatican, discussing common efforts to promote peace and protect human dignity.

"The United Nations and the Holy See share common goals and ideals," the U.N. secretary-general told the pope as the two sat across from each other at a desk in the papal library. Reporters were ushered out of the room at that point.

With translation assistance from a monsignor in the Vatican Secretariat of State, the pope and Ban spent about 20 minutes speaking privately.

The two spoke specifically about "situations of conflict and serious humanitarian emergencies, especially in Syria," but also about the ongoing tensions on the Korean peninsula and in several African countries "where peace and stability are threatened," said a statement from the Vatican press office.

Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, who spoke with the pope after Ban left, said the pope and the U.N. leader also talked about the problem of human trafficking, especially of women -- a global problem of particular concern to Pope Francis and one that he denounced in his Easter message as "the most extensive form of slavery in this 21st century."

Pope Francis spoke about the ways the Catholic church, as a religious institution, promotes many of the same goals as the United Nations, particularly on behalf of a holistic protection of human dignity and in the promotion of a "culture of encounter," the Vatican statement said.

Lombardi said the phrase is one the pope used often as archbishop of Buenos Aires to describe his approach to the promotion of dialogue, understanding and respect among people and among religions, recognizing differences, but not allowing them to prevent meetings and discussions.

After their private meeting, Ban introduced to the pope members of his entourage, which included his wife, his Argentine chief of staff and the U.N. undersecretary for disarmament.

Pope Francis went around the room giving each guest a small boxed rosary, which still carries the coat of arms of Pope Benedict XVI; a papal aide said they are awaiting the arrival of rosaries with Pope Francis' emblem.

Pope Francis spoke a few words of English during the meeting. Presenting a mosaic to Ban, the pope said, "This is for you." Then he immediately switched to Italian to describe it as a view of Rome.

Ban gave the pope a blue-bound tome containing the text of the United Nations Charter in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. He told the pope the charter reflects "the goals and objectives of human

beings, which you also promote."

The U.N. secretary-general went from the papal library to a meeting with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, then spoke briefly with reporters. He said he invited the pope to visit the United Nations -- an invitation the Vatican acknowledged, but without making a commitment to attend -- and said he was particularly pleased the new pope chose the name Francis, because it has come to signify a commitment to peacemaking.

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