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Pope Francis blasts arms dealers, decries indifference to war

by David Gibson by Religion News Service

The Francis Chronicles

Vatican City — Pope Francis on Tuesday lashed out at public indifference to the many wars raging around the globe, with especially harsh words for arms makers who he said profit from the violence and suffering.

"Think of the starving children in the refugee camps. Just think of them: this is fruit of war!" Francis said at the daily Mass he celebrates in the chapel of the Vatican guesthouse where he lives.

"And if you want," he continued, "think of the great dining halls, of the parties thrown by the bosses of the weapons industry that makes the arms that wind up (in those camps). A sick child, starving, in a refugee camp -- and the great parties, the fine life for those who manufacture weapons."

But Francis did not spare the public, either.

"Every day, in the newspapers, we find wars," he said, "and the deaths seem to be part of a normal day's tally. We are accustomed to reading these things." It seems, he added, "as though the spirit of war has taken control of us."

It's not the first time Francis has tried to bring home routine suffering that often goes unnoticed. Writing in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, in November, Francis asked: "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?"

On Tuesday, Francis noted the upcoming 100th anniversary of the start of World War I and recalled the

enormous toll that conflict exacted, claiming millions of lives by the time it ended in November 1918.

"Everyone then was horrified," Francis said. "But today it is the same! Yet rather than one great war, we have small wars everywhere. ... This great war is happening everywhere on a smaller scale, a bit under the radar, and we are not shocked! So many die for a piece of land, for some ambition, out of hatred, or racial animus."

The pope was speaking on the readings at Mass, on Tuesday taken from the New Testament letter of James, in which the author decries the wars and violence within communities and traces them to the sinful passions of those who love the world and not God.

Similarly, Francis also lamented that "this spirit of war, which distances us from God, is not just something distant from ourselves" but is "also in our homes."

"The wars in families, the wars in communities, the wars everywhere," he said. "Who among us has cried when they read the newspaper, when they see these images on the television? So many dead."

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During his first year as pope, Francis has sought to establish the church as a rallying point for peace and social justice, consciously channeling a key aspect of the spiritual legacy of his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi. In the past week, he made several appeals for peace in Ukraine, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

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