



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO INDONESIA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,  
TIMOR-LESTE AND SINGAPORE  
(2-13 September 2024)

**PRESS CONFERENCE DURING THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM SINGAPORE**

*Papal flight*  
*Friday, 13 September 2024*

**[Multimedia]**

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***Matteo Bruni***

Matteo Bruni: Greetings, Your Holiness. Thank you for the many days of this journey, and for helping us experience the joy of the people and forget our own fatigue. The journalists traveling with you have some questions. So we can begin.

**Pope Francis**

First, I want to thank all of you for your work and presence on this journey; it is very important to me. And I also want to congratulate the 'dean,' Valentina Alazraki, as this is her 160th trip. I will not tell her to retire, rather I hope she continues!

Now, please go ahead with your questions, and thank you!

**Matteo Bruni**

The first question, Your Holiness, is from a journalist from Singapore, Pei Ting Wong, from “The Straits Times”. She will ask the question in English and I will translate for you.

**Pei Ting Wong, *The Straits Times***

Pope Francis, I am very happy... I hope you enjoyed your visit to Singapore and perhaps tried the local food. What did you observe of Singapore’s culture and people? Were you surprised by anything? What can Singapore learn from the other three countries we visited? Specifically, your message about fair wages for low-paid migrants resonated with many Singaporeans. What inspired that message, and what are your thoughts on it? Lastly, you said Singapore has a special role on the international stage. What can Singapore do in a world at war, with the help of the Vatican?

**Pope Francis**

Thank you. First of all, I did not expect to find Singapore as it is. They call it the “New York of the East,” a developed, clean country with polite people, tall skyscrapers, and a great interreligious culture. The interreligious meeting I had was a model of fraternity.

Regarding migrants, I saw luxurious skyscrapers, and then others that, while not as grand, were still clean and well-maintained, which I appreciated. I did not feel there was discrimination. I was struck by the culture. Particularly with the students, on the last day, I was struck by the culture.

And then Singapore’s international role. Well, I saw that next week there is a Formula 1 race. The international role is that of a capital that attracts different cultures; it is a great capital. I did not expect to find that.

**Pei Ting Wong**

I have another question. What can Singapore learn from the other three countries: Papua Nuova Guinea, Indonesia and Timor-Leste?

**Pope Francis**

You know, there is always something to learn, because each person, each country has different treasures. That is why fraternity in communication is so important. For example, in Timor-Leste, I saw many children, but in Singapore, not so many. Perhaps that is something to learn from...

**Pei Ting Wong**

Yes, we have a low birth rate.

**Pope Francis**

Are they afraid? What is the birth rate of Singapore?

**Pei Ting Wong**

I think it is 1.2%, lower than that of Japan, as far as I know.

**Pope Francis**

The future lies with children; consider this. Ah, one other thing: you residents of Singapore are very friendly—always smiling!

**Matteo Bruni**

The second question, Your Holiness, is from Delfim De Oliveira, a journalist from “*GMN TV*” in Timor-Leste. He will ask the question in Portuguese, but we have the translation of the question.

**Delfim De Oliveira, *GMN TV (Grupo Média Nacional)***

Holy Father, I thank you for this opportunity. Your final message in the Mass in Taci Tolu is the most popular news story now in Timor. You used the expression “crocodiles” to draw the attention of the Timorese to the presence of crocodiles in Timor-Leste. What did you mean by this?

**Pope Francis**

I used the image of crocodiles coming ashore. Timor-Leste has a simple, joyful family culture. There are many children, so many! When I spoke of crocodiles, I was referring to ideas from outside that could ruin the harmony you have. Let me tell you this: I have fallen in love with Timor-Leste. Anything else?

**Delfim De Oliveira, *GMN TV (Grupo Média Nacional)***

In Timor-Leste, Catholics are the majority, but there is a strong presence of sects. Did the term “crocodiles” also refer to sects in Timor?

**Pope Francis**

It is possible...I am not speaking about that—I cannot—but it is possible. Although all religions must be respected, there is a distinction between religion and a sect. Religion is universal,

whatever it may be. A sect is restrictive; it is a small group that always has a different agenda. Thank you, and my compliments to your country!

### **Matteo Bruni**

The third question is from Francisca Christy Rosana, "*Tempo Media Group*", a journalist from Indonesia. As you know, her birthday was just a few days ago.

### **Francisca Christy Rosana, *Tempo Media Group***

Thank you, Papa Francisco. I am Francisca from Tempo Magazine. I hope you had memorable moments in Indonesia, because people in Indonesia, not only Catholics, had been waiting for you for a long time. These are my questions. We realized that in Indonesia the country is still struggling with democracy. How do you see that and what is your message for us? And the last one: Papua and Indonesia have the same problem. Sometimes investments in the mining sector are only for the oligarchs, and meanwhile local and indigenous people do not get the benefits at all. What do you think about that and what can be done? Thank you, Papa Francisco.

### **Pope Francis**

This is a common problem in developing nations. That is why it is important, as the Church's Social Doctrine says, to ensure communication between different sectors of society. You said Indonesia is a developing country, and one area that perhaps needs development is relationships in society. I enjoyed my visit; it was beautiful!

### **Matteo Bruni**

Your Holiness, the press from Papua New Guinea followed your journey closely, but unfortunately, they could not send a journalist on the flight. I would like to ask if there is anything you want to share about Papua New Guinea, especially Vanimo, which seems to be a place you personally wanted to visit.

### **Pope Francis**

I liked the country and saw a strong, developing nation. I wanted to go to Vanimo to meet a group of priests and nuns from Argentina who work there, and I saw a very beautiful reality. In all the countries, art is highly developed: dance and poetic expression... But the artistic expression in Papua New Guinea, and in Vanimo, was impressive. This impressed me deeply. The missionaries go deep into the forest to work. I liked Vanimo and the country as a whole.

**Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question comes from Stefania Falasca, who also writes for a website in China, "*Tianou Zhiku*".

**Stefania Falasca, *Tianou Zhiku***

Good evening, Holy Father. Unfortunately, I do not speak Chinese! We have just come from Singapore, where the population is predominantly Chinese, and it is a model of peaceful coexistence. Regarding peace, I would like to know your thoughts, especially given Singapore's proximity to mainland China, on China's efforts to achieve a ceasefire in conflict regions like Gaza. In July, the Beijing Declaration was signed to end Palestinian divisions. Could there be areas of cooperation on peace between China and the Holy See? And lastly, we are approaching the renewal of the agreement between China and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops. Are you satisfied with the results and dialogue so far?

**Pope Francis**

I will take the last question. I am pleased with the dialogue with China. The results are good. Even for the appointment of bishops, things are progressing with goodwill. I have spoken with the Secretariat of State, and I am happy with how things are going. As for China, I see China as an aspiration, meaning I would like to visit China. It's a great country, and I admire and respect China.

It's a country with an ancient culture. China's capacity for dialogue to understand each other goes beyond the different systems of government it has had. I believe China is a promise and a hope for the Church. Collaboration is possible, and certainly regarding conflicts. Cardinal Zuppi is working in this area, and he has contacts with China.

**Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question comes from Anna Matranga, "*CBS News*", whom you know.

**Anna Matranga, *CBS News***

Your Holiness, you have always spoken in defence of the dignity of life. In Timor-Leste, which has a high birth rate, you said you felt life pulsing and exploding with so many children. In Singapore,

you defended migrant workers. With the US elections coming up, what advice would you give a Catholic voter who must decide between one candidate who is in favour of the interruption of pregnancy and another who wants to deport 11 million migrants?

### **Pope Francis**

Both are against life: the one who throws out migrants and the one who kills children. Both are against life. I cannot decide. I am not American and I will not go to vote there. But let it be clear: sending migrants away, denying them the ability to work and refusing them hospitality is a sin, and it is grave. The Old Testament speaks repeatedly of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger—migrants. Israel must care for these three groups. Whoever fails to care for migrants is at fault; it is a sin, a sin against the lives of those people.

I once celebrated Mass at the border, near the diocese of El Paso. There were many shoes that belonged to migrants and it did not end well for them. Today, there is a flow of migration within Central America, and they are often treated like slaves because people take advantage of their situation. Migration is a right, a right that was already present in Sacred Scripture and in the Old Testament. The stranger, the orphan, and the widow—do not forget this. That is what I think about migrants.

Then, abortion. Science says that at one month after conception, all the organs of a human being are present, all of them. Having an abortion is killing a human being. Whether you like the word or not, it is murder. The Church is not closed-minded because it forbids abortion; the Church forbids abortion because it kills. It is murder; it is murder!

And we need to be clear about this: sending migrants away, not allowing them to advance, not letting them have life is something wrong; it is cruelty. Sending a child away from the womb of the mother is murder because there is life. And we must speak clearly about these things. “But... however...” No, do not say: “but... however.” Both things are clear. The orphan, the stranger, and the widow—do not forget this.

### **Anna Matranga, *CBS News***

In your opinion, Your Holiness, are there circumstances in which it is morally permissible to vote for a candidate who is in favour of the interruption of pregnancies?

### **Pope Francis**

In political morality, it is generally said that not voting is wrong, it is not good. One must vote. And one must choose the lesser evil. Which is the lesser evil? That lady or that gentleman? I do not know; each person must think and decide according to his or her own conscience.

**Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question is from Mimmo Muolo, from “Avvenire”.

**Mimmo Muolo, *Avvenire***

Good evening, Your Holiness, and thank you for these days. In the name of Italian journalists I would like to ask you:

There is a risk that the Gaza conflict will spill over into the West Bank. There was an explosion a few hours ago that killed 18 people, including some UN workers. What are your feelings at this moment, and what would you say to the warring parties? Is there the possibility that the Holy See could mediate to achieve a ceasefire and the longed-for peace?

**Pope Francis**

The Holy See is working on it. Let me tell you something: I call Gaza daily; there is a parish there, and within its school there are 600 people—Christians and Muslims—living as brothers and sisters. They tell me horrible stories and difficult situations.

I cannot say whether this war is excessively bloody, but when you see the bodies of dead children, when you hear that schools are bombed because combatants might be inside, it is horrifying. It is horrible, horrible.

Sometimes we say that it is a war of self-defence, but I believe that it is a war that is too much, too much... I apologize for saying this, but I do not see steps being taken toward peace.

For example, in Verona, I had a very beautiful experience. A Jewish man, whose wife had died in a bombing, and a man from Gaza, whose daughter had also died, both spoke about peace, embraced each other and gave a testimony of fraternity. I will say this: fraternity is more important than killing one another: fraternity, shaking hands. In the end, whoever wins the war will experience great defeat. War is always a defeat, always, without exception.

And we must not forget that. This is why everything done for peace is important. And I want to say something, and I may be getting involved in politics: I am very, very grateful to the King of Jordan. He is a man of peace and he works to achieve peace. King Abdullah is a good man.

**Matteo Bruni**

The next question is from Lisa Weiss, from the German television "ARD".

**Lisa Weiss, ARD**

Holy Father, thank you for these days.

During this trip you spoke very openly, in a very direct way, about the problems of each country, not just its beauty. And that is precisely why we wondered why you did not mention the problem of the death penalty, which still exists in Singapore.

**Pope Francis**

It is true; it did not come to mind. The death penalty does not work. We should try to eliminate it, little by little. Many countries allow for it but do not carry out the sentence. In the United States, this is the case in some states... But the death penalty must be eliminated. It is not right; it is not right.

**Matteo Bruni**

The next question is from Simon Leplâtre from "*Le Monde*".

**Simon Leplâtre, *Le Monde***

Your Holiness, first, thank you very much for this fascinating journey. In Timor-Leste you mentioned young victims of sexual abuse. We thought, of course, of Bishop Belo. In France we have a similar case, Abbé Pierre, founder of the charity Emmaus, who was repeatedly elected as the favourite personality of the French people. In both cases, their charisma made it harder to believe what happened. I would like to ask: what did the Vatican know about Abbé Pierre, and what would you say to the victims and the general population who find it hard to believe that people who did so many good deeds could also commit crimes? Speaking of France, we also would like to know: will you be in Paris for the reopening of Notre Dame in December? Thank you very much.

**Pope Francis**

I will answer the last question: I will not go to Paris; I will not go to Paris. As for the first question, you have touched on a very painful and delicate point. These are good people, people who did good, like Abbé Pierre. With all the good done, it is discovered that this person is a serious sinner. This is our human condition.



We must not say: let us cover it up so it will not be seen. Public sins are public and must be condemned. For example, Abbé Pierre was a man who did a lot of good, but was also a sinner. We must speak clearly about these things and not hide them. The fight against abuse is something we all must engage in. And we must fight against all types of abuse, not only against sexual abuse: social abuse, educational abuse, manipulating people, taking away their freedom.

In my opinion, abuse is demonic because all forms of abuse destroy the dignity of the person. All forms of abuse try to destroy who we are: the image of God. I am glad when these cases come to light.

I will tell you something I may have mentioned before: five years ago, we had a meeting with the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences about sexual abuse and other forms of abuse. We considered a well-documented study, I believe from the United Nations: 42-46% of abuse happens in the family or neighborhood... In conclusion, sexual abuse of children, of minors, is a crime and a disgrace.

### **Matteo Bruni**

Perhaps, because of the aircraft captain's instructions, we should sit down for a moment. If you want to continue, we can sit here. In the meantime we can continue with another question from Elisabetta Piqué, whom you know well, from "*La Nación*".

### **Elisabetta Piqué, *La Nación***

First of all, thank you for this beautiful journey to the ends of the earth. It has been the longest of your pontificate. Speaking of long visits, many colleagues have asked me: will we go to Argentina? That is the first question: will we go to Argentina? The second question: in Venezuela, the situation is dramatic. In these days while you were traveling, the theoretically-elected president had to go into exile in Spain. What message would you give to the people of Venezuela?

### **Pope Francis**

I have not followed the situation in Venezuela, but the message I would give to the leaders is to engage in dialogue and seek peace. Dictatorships are of no use and always end badly, sooner or later. Read the history of the Church... I would say that the government and the people must do everything possible to find a path to peace in Venezuela. I cannot give a political opinion because I do not know the details. I know that the bishops have spoken, and their message is good. As for going to Argentina, it is still undecided. I would like to go; it is my country. I would like to go, but nothing has been decided yet. There are several things that need to be resolved first. Is that all?

**Elisabetta Piqué, *La Nación***

From the Spanish group: if you go, could there be a layover in the Canary Islands?

**Pope Francis**

You have read my mind, right? I am thinking about going to the Canary Islands, because of the situation of the migrants arriving by sea. I would like to be close to the leaders and the people there.

**Matteo Bruni**

Your Holiness, perhaps we can get one more question in before lunch, from an Indonesian journalist, Bonifasius Josie Susilo Hardianto, from "*Kompas.id*".

**Bonifasius Josie Susilo Hardianto, *Kompas.id***

Thank you, Father. Some countries are starting to move away from their commitment to the Paris Agreement based on economic reasons, especially after the pandemic. Several countries are hesitant to transition to clean energy and less carbon. Your Holiness, what do you think about these issues?

**Pope Francis**

I think the climate issue is serious, very serious. Since the Paris Agreement, which was the peak, the climate meetings have been less effective. There is a lot of talk, but little action. That is my impression. I have addressed this in two documents: *[Laudato si'](#)* and *[Laudate Deum](#)*.

**Matteo Bruni**

We thank His Holiness.

**Pope Francis**

Thank you, everyone, keep going forward and continue to be courageous! I hope they feed us now!

No, there is something I have not answered...

**Matteo Bruni**

To answer Simon *Leplâtre's* question...

***Pope Francis***

*You asked what the Vatican knew about Abbé Pierre. I do not know when the Vatican found out. I do not know because I was not here and never thought about researching this. After his death, for sure; but before his death, I do not know.*

**Matteo Bruni**

*Thank you, Your Holiness, for this clarification. Have a good conclusion to your journey.*