



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING PROMOTED BY "DOCTORS WITH AFRICA" (CUAMM)**

Paul VI Audience Hall

Saturday, 19 November 2022

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

I am happy to welcome you. I thank the Archbishop of Padua for his courageous words. Today you make up the missionary community of “Doctors with Africa — CUAMM”.

I wish to emphasize the fact that your story begins when, 70 years ago, a college was inaugurated in Padua to host young African medical students. Young Africans. Already from here we can see your style: being *with Africa*, even before being *for Africa*. And this is precisely the right mindset, because in the imagination, in the collective subconscious, there is that ugly mentality that Africa should be exploited. And counteracting this is your no: being with Africa. Thus, being with Africa and being for Africa. From that experience began a journey of sharing and service that in these 70 years has crossed almost the entire African continent to bring medical care, always with a focus on development and with a preference for training local personnel. There is great intellectual capital in Africa: we must help it develop. About a month ago, I met with university students from all over Africa on Zoom. I was amazed by the intellectual capacity of these young men and women. Please, may they not be lost; let us help them grow, move forward, because Africa should not be exploited; it must be promoted.

Your work is a concrete example of putting into practice something we ask every day in the “Our Father”. We ask our heavenly Father, “Give us this day our daily bread”. And this “*bread*” is also *health*. Health is a primary good, like bread, like water, like a home, like work. You are striving to ensure that there is no lack of daily bread for so many brothers and sisters who today, in the 21st century, do not have access to normal, basic health care. It is shameful: humanity is incapable of solving this problem, but it is capable of advancing the industry of weapons, which destroy

everything. Billions are being spent on weapons. Other huge resources are burnt in the ephemeral and evasion industry — the “industry of appearances”, for example... When we pray “give us this day our daily bread”, we should think carefully about what we say, because so many, too many men and women, of this bread receive only the crumbs, or not even that, simply because they were born in certain places of the world. I think of so many mothers who cannot safely give birth and sometimes lose their lives; or so many children who die in early childhood.

Your presence here today brings my heart close to countries that are particularly dear to me, such as the [Central African Republic, where I went in 2015 to open the Holy Door, in Bangui](#); and South Sudan where, God willing, I will travel early next year. These are very poor and fragile countries, which the world considers important only for the resources to be exploited, and which instead the Lord considers his beloved ones, in which he sends you to be good Samaritans, witnesses of his Gospel. Do not be afraid to face difficult challenges, to intervene in remote places marked by violence, where people do not have the opportunity to take care of themselves. Be with them! Should it take years of toil, should there be successive disappointments and failures to achieve results, do not be discouraged. Persevere with dogged service and dialogue open to all, as instruments for peace and overcoming conflicts.

Another beautiful and important aspect of your being *with Africa* is your collaboration with local churches and institutions in the countries where you work, always with a view to sharing and promoting the people of Africa, against exploitation — promotion. I also encourage you to continue to work together with religious missionary congregations who are generously engaged in the health sector in Africa. Work with them by joining forces, providing your experience and expertise, supporting Gospel-inspired social innovation, and also exploring new forms of financing health services aimed at the poorest.

The Covid pandemic, war and the severe international crisis are putting everyone to the test. As are conditions of drought: I have followed the disasters in Kenya caused by drought. And if it is difficult for the developed world, it is even more so for Africa, where the consequences are dramatic because the people are already very poor and lack social protection systems. Africa is going backwards and poverty is getting worse. Food prices are going up everywhere, bringing hunger and malnutrition; health transportation is stalled because of the excessive cost of fuel; medicines and medical supplies are in short supply everywhere. It is a hidden “war” that no one discusses and seems not to exist, but which instead has a very strong impact, especially on the poorest. May the Lord help you to cross this “night” with courage, with your hearts turned to the dawn, which will illuminate those small shoots of hope that we already glimpse and to which you yourselves are witnesses. I thank you for being a voice of what Africa is experiencing; for bringing to the surface the hidden and silent sufferings of the poor you encounter in your daily commitment. I urge you to continue to give a voice to Africa, to provide a space for it to express itself: Africa has a voice, but it is not heard. You must make it possible for Africa’s voice to be heard; to continue to give voice to what is unseen, to its struggles and hopes, to stir the conscience of a world

sometimes focused too much on itself and little on the other. The Lord hears the cry of his oppressed people and asks us to be artisans of a new future, humble and tenacious, with the poorest.

Finally, I urge you to have a special focus on young people: to encourage in every way, in your activities, job placement of local youth, so eager to live their future as protagonists especially in their countries of origin. I tell you that I was moved by this Zoom meeting I had — over an hour and a half — with young Africans. Their intelligence, their worries... Help them progress. They are a treasure. They are extremely intelligent. But do not allow them to feel that their projects cannot advance due to geographic, social, economic, and many times cultural conditions that impede them. New generations can create new bridges between Italy and Africa. This happens when young people meet, confront each other and open up to the world without fear or prejudice. You can involve universities in this adventure, so that the training, research and innovation paths that are provided for Italian youth, are also directed to African youth. It is in this exchange that leaders capable of guiding processes of integral human development are built.

I would like to conclude with a photograph, with an image. When I was visiting Bangui, I had the opportunity to meet — by chance — a religious sister who had been in Africa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for over 50 years. She had travelled to Bangui via canoe to go grocery shopping. She was an obstetrician, with more than 2,000 deliveries under her belt. She was the mother there! That woman had been an obstetrician for 50 years. She was simple and was accompanied by a little girl — four or five years old — who called her “mamma”. And to make a joke, what did I say? “Is this a novice in your Congregation?”. And she said, “No, no. She’s my daughter”. I looked at her, not understanding. And she said to me, “Look, her mother died in childbirth. The father left, abandoned everyone. She was alone, and I legally adopted her”. A courageous nun, eh? She took charge of her. And she still lives there, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and she still takes the canoe to Bangui and back every Saturday for groceries. And she continues to work as an obstetrician. A hidden life that gives life. I want to leave you with this image. Let us think of the many men and women who, like this nun, have spent their lives in Africa to help Africans grow. Continue onward, be brave with these pioneers we have before us!

I thank you so much for this meeting and for what you do. May Our Lady always accompany you on your journey and in your work. I too am close to you in prayer. From the bottom of my heart, I bless you, the whole CUAMM family and all the people you care for. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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