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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis in Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius (4 to 10 September 2019) – Visit to the City of Friendship - Akamasoa

Visit to the City of Friendship - Akamasoa

This afternoon, at 15.10 local time (14.10 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis visited the city of Friendship in Akamasoa.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed at the main entrance by the Reverend Fr. Pedro Pablo Opeka, C.M., founder of the humanitarian project Akamasoa, who accompanied him to the Manantenasoa auditorium, where around 8,000 young people were gathered.

After the entrance hymn, words of welcome from Fr. Pedro and a brief greeting from a girl from Akamasoa, Pope Francis gave his address.

At the end of the visit, while the young people sang a hymn, the Holy Father left the auditorium and transferred by popemobile to the Mahatazana worksite for a moment of prayer with the workers.

The following are the words of greeting pronounced by the Holy Father during his visit to the City of Friendship:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Good evening to all! Good evening!

For me it has been a great joy to meet here my former student, Father Pedro; he was my student in the Theology Faculty in the years 1967-1968. He is no longer a student; he discovered love for work, for working. Thank you very much, Father!

It is a great joy to be with you in this great enterprise. Akamasoa is an expression of God's presence in the midst of his people who are poor. His is no isolated or occasional presence... it is the presence of a God who has chosen to live and dwell forever in the midst of his people.

You have come in good numbers this evening, in the heart of this city of Friendship that you built with your own hands. I have no doubt that you will continue to build it, so that many families will be able to live with dignity. Seeing your happy faces, I give thanks to the Lord who has heard the cry of the poor and shown his love in tangible signs like the creation of this village. Your plea for help – which arose from being homeless, from seeing your children grow up malnourished, from being without work and often regarded with indifference if not disdain – has turned into a song of hope for you and for all those who see you. Every corner of these neighbourhoods, every school or dispensary, is a song of hope that refutes and silences any suggestion that some things are "inevitable". Let us say it forcefully: poverty is not inevitable!

Indeed this village reflects a long history of courage and mutual assistance. This city is the fruit of many years of hard work. At its foundations, we find a living faith translated into concrete actions capable of "moving mountains". A faith that made it possible to see opportunity in place of insecurity; to see hope in place of inevitability; to see life in a place that spoke only of death and destruction. Remember what the Apostle Saint James wrote: "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (*Jas 2:17*). The building blocks of teamwork and a sense of family and community have enabled you to rebuild, with patience and skill, your confidence not only in yourselves but also in one another. This has given you the chance to take the lead in shaping this enterprise. It has been an education in the values handed down by those first families who took a risk with Father Opeka – the values of hard work, discipline, honesty, self-respect and respect for others. You have come to understand that God's dream is not only for our personal development, but essentially for the development of the community, and that there is no worse form of slavery, as Father Pedro reminded us, than to live only for ourselves.

Dear young people of Akamasoa, I would like to say a special word to you. Never stop fighting the baneful effects of poverty; never yield to the temptation of settling for an easy life or withdrawing into yourselves. Thank you, Fanny, for the moving testimony you shared with us on behalf of the youth of this village. Dear young people, this great work accomplished by your elders, is now yours to carry forward. You will find the strength to do so in your faith and in the living witness that your elders have made a reality in your lives. Allow the gifts that the Lord has given you to flourish in your midst. Ask him to help you to be generous in the service of your brothers and sisters. In this way, Akamasoa will not be merely an example for the coming generations, but something even greater: the point of departure for a work inspired by God that will come to full flower in the measure that you continue to witness to his love for present and future generations.

Let us pray that throughout Madagascar and everywhere in the world this ray of light will spread, so that we can enact models of development that support the fight against poverty and social exclusion, on the basis of trust, education, hard work and commitment. For these are always indispensable for the dignity of the human person.

Thank you, friends of Akamasoa, dear Father Pedro and co-workers, thank you once again for your prophetic witness, for your witness that brings hope. May God continue to bless you.

I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.
