Fact Sheet: Popes and the United Nations

Pope Francis will visit the United Nations headquarters on September 25, 2015 to meet with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, hold a town hall meeting with UN staff, and address the UN General Assembly.

Goal? The pope is likely to shed light on humanitarian issues as well as participating in the discussion about Global Climate Change, the theme of this September United Nations meeting.

“I think that the three most important issues the Pope wants to address is the responsibility of humankind to be in right relationship with each other with the earth and therefore also with God,” explained Professor Judith Kubicki, CSSF, a nun and Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University. “This is expressed in his frequent reminders that we are responsible for the poor and suffering among us, for taking care of the gift we have in creation and for remembering and acknowledging that God is a God of mercy and compassion.”

This climate-change-themed UN meeting is occurring barely three months after Pope Francis published his Encyclical Letter on "Care for our Common Home" which not only acknowledged, but also called attention to the negative effect of human impact on the environment.

The United Nations

- The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 and currently has 193 member states. Its purpose is to take action on humanitarian issues facing us in the 21st century.
- 15 of these are members of the UN Security Council including 5 permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and 10 non-permanent members, each elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly: currently Angola, Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Spain, and Venezuela.
- The presidency of the Council is held by each of the members in turn for one month, and the Russian Federation is the president for the month of September 2015.
The Holy See became a Permanent Observer State at the United Nations on 6 April 1964, and is always invited to participate in the meetings of all the sessions of the General Assembly.

**Popes at the UN**

Pope Francis will be the fourth pope ever to visit the United Nations in its 70 years of existence. Previous papal visits to the UN include:

- **Pope Paul VI in 1965**: The main topic of his address was the need for peace in the world.
- **Pope St. John Paul II in 1979 and 1995**:
  - The topic of his 1979 address was human rights.
  - During his 1995 address, Pope St. John Paul II addressed the importance of freedom in global political structure as well as a respect for mankind regardless of differences.
- **Pope Benedict XVI in 2008**:
  - In his address, Pope Benedict XVI discussed the importance of protecting not only the environment but also poor countries from the effects of globalization.

**Importance of this visit**

- The Pontiff comes during the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.
- At the UN, Pope Francis will be addressing an audience that is not all Catholic, giving him a new platform for addressing the world at large.
- **Maureen Tilley**, Professor of Theology at Fordham University, expects the Pope to use his UN address as an opportunity to lobby for peace in a broad sense. “The issue of war is much more complex than it was in the 1960s. And I think he’s going to go for the complexity of war and economic issues,” she predicts. “No longer is war envisioned as a clash between two nations over territory or mineral riches. It’s seen in a much bigger context of access to water, the difference between the top one percent and the bottom 20 percent. It’s seen in the access to fertile land—it’s seen and in terms of migration.”
- Since the Vatican has a voice and a vote in UN Conferences, the Vatican's values can effect United Nations’ action. “Pope Francis will be the fourth pope to address the U.N. The Holy See is represented in the deliberations of the U.N.,” **Professor J. Patrick Hornbeck II**, Associate Professor of Theology and Chair of the Theology Department at Fordham University, notes. “And therefore the Pope is speaking as both the head of a sovereign entity and as the leader of one of the world's great religious traditions. The speech at the U.N. gives the Pope the opportunity to set forth his views on some of the most important international issues of our
day, including the protection of the environment and the consequences of global capitalism, in addition to world peace and religious freedom. It will be interesting to see which of the many themes Pope Francis has written about he chooses to emphasize here.”

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