



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 6 December 2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Journey to Myanmar and Bangladesh

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!*

Today I would like to speak about the *Apostolic Journey that I made in recent days in Myanmar and Bangladesh*. It was a great gift from God, and therefore I thank him for everything, especially for the encounters I was able to have. I renew the expression of my gratitude to the Authorities of the two Countries and the respective Bishops, for all their work of preparation and for the welcome accorded to me and to my co-workers. I would like to offer a heartfelt 'thank you' to the Burmese people and to the Bangladeshi people, who showed me so much faith and so much affection. Thank you!

For the first time a Successor of Peter has visited Myanmar, and this occurred shortly after diplomatic relations were established between this Country and the Holy See.

I wished, in this case too, to express the *closeness* of Christ and of the Church to a people that has suffered as a result of conflict and repression, and which now *is slowly moving toward a new situation of freedom and peace*. A people in whom the Buddhist religion is deeply rooted, with its spiritual and ethical principles, and among whom Christians are present as a small flock and as leaven of the Kingdom of God. I had the joy of confirming this vibrant and fervent Church in the faith and in communion, at the meeting with the Bishops of the Country and during the two Eucharistic celebrations. The first was held in the great sports ground in the centre of Yangon, and that day's Gospel reading recalled that persecution due to faith in Jesus is common for his disciples, as an occasion to bear *witness*, however, "not a hair of their head will perish" (cf. Lk 21:12-19). The second Mass, the last event of my visit in Myanmar, was dedicated to *young people: a sign of hope* and a special gift of the Virgin Mary, in the cathedral that bears her name. In the faces of those young people, full of joy, I have seen the future of Asia: a future which will not be that of those who build weapons, but of those who sow fraternity. And also as a sign of hope, I blessed the cornerstones of 16 churches, of the seminary and of the nunciature: 18!

In addition to the Catholic community, I was able to meet the Authorities of Myanmar, encouraging

the Country's peacebuilding effort and hoping that *all the different components* of the nation, none excluded, may *cooperate in this process with mutual respect*. In this spirit I wished to meet the representatives of the various religious communities present in the Country. In particular, to the Supreme Council of Buddhist Monks, I manifested the Church's esteem for their ancient spiritual tradition, and my confidence that *Christians and Buddhists* together can join in helping people to love God and neighbour, rejecting all violence and countering evil with good.

After leaving Myanmar, I went to *Bangladesh* where, first of all I honoured the martyrs of the fight for Independence and the "Father of the Nation". The population of Bangladesh is mainly Muslim, and thus my visit — in the footsteps of Blessed Paul vi and of Saint John Paul ii — marked a further step *in favour of respect and dialogue between Christianity and Islam*.

To the Country's Authorities I recalled that from the beginning, the Holy See has supported the will of the Bangladeshi people to establish an independent nation, including the requirement that religious freedom always be safeguarded within it. In particular, I wished to express solidarity with Bangladesh in its commitment to help the great influx of Rohingya refugees that has poured into its territory, where the population density is already among the highest in the world.

The Mass celebrated in a historical park in Dhaka was enriched by the *Ordination of 16 priests*, and this was one of the most significant and joyful events of the journey. In fact, in Bangladesh and in Myanmar as in other Southeast Asian Countries, thanks be to God there is no shortage of vocations, a sign of a living community, wherein resonates the voice of the Lord who calls them to follow him. I shared this joy with the Bishops of Bangladesh, and I encouraged them in their generous work for families, for the poor, for education, for dialogue and social peace. And I shared this joy with so many of the Country's priests, consecrated women and men, as well as with seminarians and novices, in whom I saw the seeds of the Church in that land.

In Dhaka we experienced a profound moment of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, which afforded me the opportunity to emphasize openness of heart as the foundation of a culture of encounter, harmony and of peace.

In addition, I visited the "*Mother Teresa House*", where the Saint resided when she was in that city, and which welcomes innumerable orphans and people with disabilities. There, according to their charism, the Sisters live each day the prayer of adoration and service to the poor and suffering Christ. And their lips are never without a smile: nuns who pray a great deal, who serve the suffering, and do this constantly with a smile. It is a beautiful testimony. I thank these little Sisters very much.

The last event with the young people of Bangladesh was rich in testimony, song and dance. How well these Bangladeshi people dance! They really know how to dance! It was a celebration that manifested the joy of the Gospel received by that culture; a joy made fruitful by the sacrifices of

many missionaries, many catechists and Christian parents. Also present at the encounter were young Muslims and those of other religions: a sign of hope for Bangladesh, for Asia and for the entire world.

Thank you.

APPEAL

My thoughts now go to Jerusalem. In this regard, I cannot but express my deep concern for the situation that has arisen in recent days; and, at the same time, I cannot but launch a heartfelt appeal that everyone's effort respect the status quo of the city, in conformity with the pertinent United Nations Resolutions.

Jerusalem is a unique city, sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in which the Holy Places are venerated by the respective religions, and which has a special vocation for peace.

I pray the Lord that this identity may be preserved and strengthened to the benefit of the Holy Land, of the Middle East and of the entire world, and that wisdom and prudence prevail, in order to prevent additional new elements of tension in a global panorama that is already convulsed and marked by many cruel conflicts.

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Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from Wales, Denmark, Nigeria and the United States of America. I offer a particular greeting to the members of the World Youth Alliance and the musical group *Up with People*. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I joyfully greet and welcome the group of Syro-Iraqi refugees residing in Italy, as well as the priests, nuns and lay people from Myanmar and Bangladesh who are present here to reciprocate [my visit to their countries of origin](#).

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today is the memorial of Saint Nicholas of Bari. Dear *young people*, may you place the search for God and for his love above all else; dear *sick people*, may the example of the saints be of help and comfort to you at

the moment of your greatest need; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, with the grace of God, make your union deeper and more steadfast each day.