

## Africa Faith and Justice Network on Pope's Statement Defending Sacredness of Life and Condemning Racism

**Washington DC** - Wednesday during his General Audience, Pope Francis spoke on the sacredness of every human life in response to protests, rioting, and global unrest following the death of George Floyd while in police custody. Floyd is only the most recent victim of years of institutionalized violence against black men and women. This tragedy has opened up wounds for many people of African descent and others who have experienced racism first-hand.

Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP, Executive Director of the Africa Faith and Justice Network states that:

"The trauma felt by people of African descent and others, watching the slow killing of George Floyd as he gasped for air, has awakened many personal experiences of racism throughout the US.

"Our faith teaches us that each person is an image of God, and we are obligated to uphold the dignity of all. Institutionalized racism is a grave indictment on a person and community that profess the Christian faith but fail to see the intrinsic evil of racism. Pope Francis reminded us that racism is a sin.

"We must ensure that we do not absolve ourselves from blame by shifting this issue to the police. It is a collective guilt of which some of the police are only a part. Now is the time for all to intentionally and formally repent for the sin of slavery and racism which has permeated every fabric of our communal life. Now is the time for Congress, the Administration, and all levels of government to systematically repeal all overt and subtle discriminatory laws enacted to continue the subjugation of people of African descent and uphold just laws that ensure all people have equal rights."

Rev. Barthelemy Bazemo, M.Afr, Policy Analyst of the Africa Faith and Justice Network said:

"There is so much fear and social unrest because we are hurting as individuals, as a community, and as people of color. Now is the time we need to turn to God for healing and choose to act to make the necessary institutional changes.

"Racism is a social ill that cannot be cured without the participation of every member of society individually, including children and families.

"People of faith should use this time to reflect on how we, as Christian communities, have failed those we serve. I challenge all people of faith to take this time to reflect inwardly and change our own hearts. I also challenge people of faith, especially Christian leaders and policy makers, to not just talk about change; ensure that we see the change we need, stop institutionalized racism, and have consequences for those who spread racist propaganda."

Sr. Florence Deacon, OSF, Board Chair of the Africa Faith and Justice Network said:

“When I marched for racial justice after the death of Reverend Martin Luther King, I never imagined that America would still be marching 50 years later.

“We need to focus our pain and outrage on both personal and institutional change; examining our own attitudes and calling out racism where we see it; insisting on improvement in education, health care, economic policy and the justice system; and praying that we and our country may be healed. Only then will we live up to the values of our faith and our nation.”

*The Africa Faith & Justice Network is a faith-based, non-partisan coalition of 29 US-based religious communities of men and women. Inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, AFJN seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. [www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org)*

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