

# Africa: When the Pope denounces economic colonialism

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**The Pope has once again spoken out against wars and the economic plundering of Africa. The Vatican has been making free elections its hobbyhorse for some time now and has taken a stand against the aggression suffered by members of the LGBT community.**

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This is the fourth time the Pope has visited Africa, visiting two countries scarred by political violence, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. It is a religious visit but also a political one, especially since in the DRC the leaders cannot ignore the country's 40 million faithful.

## Money and networks

The Catholic Church is one of the most successful institutions in the DRC. Its power is based primarily on its social network. Indeed, during colonization, it was responsible for education and health. It has thus developed a network that continues to this day. It is in charge of 30% of schools, 45% of hospitals and nearly 2,500 charitable institutes. With its 41 dioceses and 1,000 parishes, it covers the entire country. The "church's" land holdings remain the largest in the country. It is easy to understand what is at stake in the Pope's visit for the political authorities. On this occasion, they did not hesitate to ruthlessly expel the thousands of vendors installed on the main boulevards of the capital Kinshasa.

## A political player

The bishops have often played a mediating role in the democratization processes of African countries since the fall of the Berlin Wall. They presided over the national conferences that introduced multiparty politics in the 1990s.

In the DRC, the Catholic Church has a long tradition of opposition to the government. In 2016, the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo did not hesitate to call on the population to take to the streets to prevent a modification of the Constitution wanted by Joseph Kabila, allowing him a third term and thereby continuing the economic predations revealed by the "[Congo Hold-up](#)" affair.

The question of the reliability of the polls is a major issue for the Vatican. The Pope recalled this during his meeting with the Congolese authorities. Even the church in Gabon, known for being

particularly conciliatory with the government in power, has taken a position on the importance of respecting the will of the voters. Moreover, on the continent, the organization “Turn the page”, which fights for the respect of political changeovers, is widely supported by church structures.

## **Denouncing violence**

It is therefore with a certain credibility that the Pope can denounce “economic colonialism” by crying out “take your hands off Africa! Stop suffocating Africa: it is not a mine to be exploited or a land to be robbed.” If this trip had any merit, it was certainly to draw attention to the suffering of the people of the DRC and Southern Sudan who are victims of militias. In the east of the DRC there are more than 120 armed groups that can racket and martyr the population with impunity. Responsibility for this situation is shared between politicians who manipulate and exacerbate inter-community conflicts, the government which turns a blind eye to the complicity of its army with certain militias, and the authorities of border countries such as Rwanda or Uganda which support certain fighters such as those of the M23.

If the Pope’s latest remarks on homosexuality, despite his retractions, are highly condemnable, they should not overshadow his stance against any form of criminalization on a continent where 27 countries out of 54 repress same-sex relations. As well as his call for the conversion... of religious people to welcome members of LGBT communities, while most prelates, in a nauseating competition with other religions, continue to spearhead the stigmatization of homosexuals.

With or without the pope, we make our own the proclamation of the prophet Isaiah who calls (in chapter 58 of the Old Testament) “to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke”... especially those of patriarchy and capitalism.

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