

Pope Says Global Migration Should Favor Encounter, Not Conflict

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VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Pope Benedict XVI appealed for generosity to the world's migrant population, saying the movement of peoples should foster a peaceful encounter between civilizations and not conflict.

In remarks aimed at migrant maritime workers, the pope also warned of the risks of modern piracy and the damage caused by illegal fishing.

The pope made the comments Jan. 18, which the church celebrates as the World Day for Migrants and Refugees.

"I encourage individuals, communities and institutions to be generous to all who have left their homeland. May the Father of mercies open our eyes and our hearts to the sufferings and needs of those who have entrusted themselves to our hospitality," the pope said.

Christians have a special responsibility to witness the Gospel to migrants from other countries, and to approach migration as a positive social phenomenon that can lead to cultural exchanges, he said.

"Let us pray and act so that this happens more and more in a peaceful and constructive way, in respect and dialogue, avoiding any temptation of conflict or abuse," he said.

The pope said workers in the fishing and shipping industries endure a number of traditional problems, including long periods away from home and the comforts of land. Today, he said, they also face the risks of piracy.

In recent months, heavily armed pirates have assaulted cargo and other ships, in particular off the coast of Africa and in the Indian Ocean. Some crew members have died and others have been taken hostage.

The pope also cited the harm done by illegal fishing. U.S. officials said recently that illegal fishing was a global problem that is depleting fish stocks and hurting the economies of nations and the livelihoods of people who depend on sustainable fishing.

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