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South Korea Visit: Meeting With Government Officials

Pope Francis

Starting his first visit to Asia, Pope Francis urged South Korean political and civic leaders to seek peace on their divided peninsula and strengthen their nation's commitment to democracy and social justice. "Peace is not simply the absence of war, but the work of justice," the pope said Aug. 14 in a speech at Seoul's Blue House, the official residence of President Park Geun-hye. Addressing some 200 government officials, Pope Francis noted that the country, divided between North and South since the end of the Korean War in 1953, "has long suffered because of a lack of peace,"

"Korea's quest for peace is a cause close to our hearts, for it affects the stability of the entire area and indeed of our whole war-weary world."

and he praised "efforts being made in favor of reconciliation and stability." Introducing the pope before his speech, President Park said the war "still casts a shadow" over Korea, "dividing not only the country but so many families." Tensions with communist North Korea have risen markedly in recent years, especially over Pyongyang's development of nuclear arms. Less than an hour before the pope's plane landed in Seoul, North Korea fired three short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan in the latest of a large number of missile tests it began launching in March. Pyongyang had already refused the church's request to send a delegation of Catholics to the South for the pope's visit. Speaking in English in public for first time as pope, he told diplomats in the audience, who included envoys of other Asian countries, that they faced the "perennial challenge of breaking down the walls of distrust and hatred by promoting a culture of reconciliation and solidarity." The pope's speech follows, copyright © 2014 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

It is a great joy for me to come to Korea, the land of the morning calm, and to experience not only the natural beauty of this country, but above all the beauty of its people and its rich history and culture. This national legacy has been tested through the years by violence, persecution and war. But despite these trials, the heat of the day and the dark of the night have always given way to the morning calm, that is, to an undiminished hope for justice,

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