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Pope urges G20 leaders to drop `futile pursuit` of military solution in Syria

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USPA News - Pope Francis on Thursday urged leaders of the Group of 20 to abandon the "futile pursuit" of a military solution in Syria and to instead make a renewed commitment to reach a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation, the Vatican said. The pontiff made his appeal in a letter sent to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who presides over the Group of 20 meeting which runs from Thursday through Friday in the Russian city of St. Petersburg.

The G20 is comprised of leaders from the world's 20 largest economies, including the European Union (EU). "To the leaders present, to each and every one, I make a heartfelt appeal for them to help find ways to overcome the conflicting positions and to lay aside the futile pursuit of a military solution," Francis wrote. "Rather, let there be a renewed commitment to seek, with courage and determination, a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation of the parties, unanimously supported by the international community." The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, similar to those across the Middle East and North Africa. The Syrian government violently cracked down on the protests, setting off an armed conflict between pro-Assad forces and anti-government forces. A number of jihadist groups have since joined the fight against Assad's regime. Francis said the "senseless massacre now unfolding" in Syria could have been avoided if "one-sided interests" would not have prevailed since the beginning of the crisis. "The leaders of the G20 cannot remain indifferent to the dramatic situation of the beloved Syrian people which has lasted far too long, and even risks bringing greater suffering to a region bitterly tested by strife and needful of peace," he said. The pontiff recognized the G20 meeting focuses on economic topics in particular, but emphasized the world economy can only develop if it allows a dignified way of life for all human beings. "Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself," he said. Francis added: "Unfortunately, the many armed conflicts which continue to afflict the world today present us daily with dramatic images of misery, hunger, illness and death. Without peace, there can be no form of economic development. Violence never begets peace, the necessary condition for development." The pontiff, who will host a peace vigil for Syria in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City on Saturday evening, added that all governments have the "moral duty" to do everything possible to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those who are suffering because of the conflict in Syria, both within and beyond the country's borders. The United Nations estimates that more than 100,000 people, many of them civilians, have been killed and millions more have fled to neighboring countries since the start of the uprising. Opposition groups estimate the number of deaths is far higher, but those figures cannot be independently verified. Western countries, including the United States and France, are considering to take military action against Syria after they accused forces loyal to Assad of using chemical weapons - including sarin - during the August 21 attack near Damascus. Assad has rejected those accusations, urging the West to provide evidence that his regime was responsible.

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United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com