

# *Pope holds first post-lockdown audience, hails Italian healthcare workers*

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Vatican City, June 21 (RHC)-- Pope Francis held his first audience for a group of people since Italy lifted its coronavirus lockdown, granting it to health workers from the Italian region most affected by the pandemic.

"You were one of the supporting pillars of the entire country," he told doctors and nurses from the Lombardy region gathered in the Vatican's frescoed Clementine Hall, which had not been used for months because of the crisis.

"To those of you here and to your colleagues all across Italy go my esteem and my sincere thanks, and I know very well I am interpreting everyone's sentiments," he said.

Italy returned to relative normality on June 3 when Italians were allowed to move between regions again. But rules such as social distancing in public and wearing masks are still in effect.

Nearly 35,000 people in Italy have died of coronavirus, the fourth highest number in the world after the United States, Brazil and Britain.

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