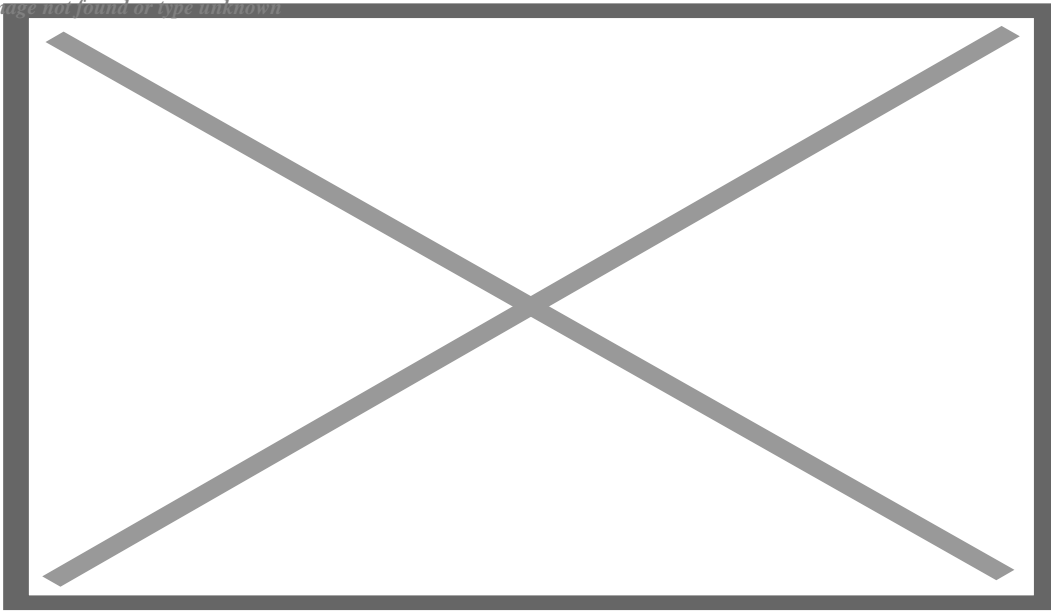


Pope slams indifference towards migrants arriving in Europe by sea

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Vatican City, September 23 (RHC)-- Pope Francis has blasted the “fanaticism of indifference” that greets migrants seeking a better life, as he arrived in France amid a new influx of refugees from Africa reaching the coasts of Europe.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church entered the growing political controversy on Friday during the first day of a visit to the Mediterranean city of Marseille, saying European governments had a duty to rescue asylum seekers who take to sea to escape conflict.

He warned against a “paralysis of fear” as European nations shift responsibility for taking care of people arriving by sea and singled out “the disinterest that, with velvet gloves, condemns others to death”.

“People who are at risk of drowning when abandoned on the waves must be rescued,” he said from the hilltop Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde overlooking the glistening Mediterranean waters.

In remarks dedicated to migrants and refugees lost at sea, the Pope said, “It is a duty of humanity, it is a duty of civilisation” to save people in difficulty. A surge in migrant and refugee boats arriving from North Africa on the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa last week triggered outrage in Italy and a heated debate

across Europe over how to share responsibility for the influx.

The desperate conditions that cause many people to leave their homes for a new life, and the risks they take to do so, have been a key theme during Francis' decade as head of the Roman Catholic Church.

In unprepared remarks added at the end of his speech, the Pope thanked NGOs rescuing migrants in danger at sea and condemned efforts to prevent their activity as "gestures of hate."

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