

Syria: Pope warns Barack Obama that military strike would be 'futile'

Syria: Pope warns Barack Obama that military strike would be 'futile'

The Pope has warned US president Barack Obama that targeting Syria with military strikes would be a "futile pursuit". The widespread killings in Syria had spiralled due to a lack of interest from the world, he said.



In a sharply-worded intervention in the debate on the Syrian conflict, Pope Francis also accused world leaders of having stood by and allowed a "senseless massacre" to unfold in the country.

The Pope wrote in a letter, delivered to Vladimir Putin but addressed to all the G20 leaders meeting: "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."

He added: "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."

"Moreover, all governments have the moral duty to do everything possible to ensure humanitarian assistance to those suffering because of the conflict, both within and beyond the country's borders."

The widespread killings in Syria had spiralled due to a lack of interest from the world, he said. "It is regrettable that, from the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, one-sided interests have prevailed and in fact hindered the search for a solution that would have avoided the senseless massacre now unfolding."

The Russian conference, he warned, needed to focus on Syria. "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."

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi yesterday denied claims made by the Argentinian newspaper Clarin that the Pope had contacted President Assad of Syria, urging him to halt attacks in

Syria.

Foreign ambassadors were summoned to a briefing by Dominique Mamberti, the Vatican's foreign secretary, on Thursday, on the Pope's appeals to halt hostilities in Syria.

The Pope's push for a peaceful solution in Syria includes a four-hour vigil to be held in St Peter's Square on Saturday evening. The Vatican will station 50 confessors around the square. Bishops' conferences around the world have announced local vigils.

An official at the Vatican's justice and peace office warned earlier this week that military action in Syria could spark a world war. In a tweet this week, the Pope wrote: "War never again! Never again war!"

The Pope, who is a Jesuit, has been backed in his criticism of a military strike on Syria by the head of the Jesuits, Father Adolfo Nicolas.

In an interview with the Independent Catholic News, posted on September 4, Father Nicolas said a strike would be "an abuse of power".

"I cannot understand who gave the United States or France the right to act against a country in a way that will certainly increase the suffering of the citizens of that country, who, by the way, have already suffered beyond measure," he said.

In a stinging attack on the White House, he said: "The US has to stop acting and reacting like the big boy of the neighbourhood of the world. This leads inevitably to abuse, harassment and bullying of the weaker members of the community.

"We, Jesuits, support 100 per cent the Holy Father and wish with all our hearts that the threatened attack on Syria does not take place."

Tom Kington - The Telegraph