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Respect, unity and service are the foundations of a strong family, a solid democracy and a healthy response to the gift of faith — any faith, Pope Francis told the people of Kenya. Meeting ecumenical and interreligious leaders, celebrating a large outdoor Mass and greeting priests, religious and seminarians in Nairobi Nov. 26, Pope Francis said faith means serving one's fellow human beings.

The pope's day began early on the rainy morning with an intimate meeting with 40 representatives of Kenya's Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist communities, as well as with a Masai elder and other leaders of communities that have maintained their traditional African beliefs.

During the meeting in the Vatican nunciature, Pope Francis remembered the terrorist attacks on Kenya's Westgate Mall in 2013, Garissa University College in April and Mandera in July, and urged a common recognition that "the God who we seek to serve is a God of peace." The Somali-based militant group al-Shabab claimed responsibility for all three attacks the pope mentioned.

"All too often, young people are being radicalized in the name of religion to sow discord and fear, and to tear at the very fabric of our societies," the pope said. "How important it is that we be seen as prophets of peace, peacemakers who invite others to live in peace, harmony and mutual respect."

Abdulghafur El-Busaidy, chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, greeted the pope as "a revolutionary-minded man of God" on behalf of the country's Muslims, who, he said, make up about 30 percent of the population.

"As people of one God and of this world," he told the pope, "we must stand up and in unison clasp hands together in all the things that are essential for our collective progress as one humanity, one world irrespective of location, culture, language, race, ethnicity, status, politics ... for we are citizens of the same world."

Peace in the world is not possible without peace among religions, he said, citing the work of "the German philosopher Hans Kung," a Swiss priest whose authority to teach as a Catholic professor in Germany was withdrawn by the Vatican.

The Muslim leader told Pope Francis and the other religious authorities, "There is so much to talk about," but the pope's schedule allotted only 45 minutes for the gathering. Still, El-Busaïdy told Pope Francis and the others, "I wish you success in achieving the vision of a better world you have accepted for yourselves and for future generations.

Anglican Archbishop Eliud Wabukala thanked the pope for the Catholic Church's efforts to preserve "the apostolic faith" and its commitment to defending marriage and family life "at a time when some of these principles are being called into question."

Kenya, which has more than 13.8 million Catholics, is served by more than 5,300 religious women, close to 800 religious brothers, some 2,700 diocesan priests, just over 900 religious-order priests and four permanent deacons.

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