

Pope Francis promises to visit Lebanon

Mon, 2021-03-08 21:53

ROME: Pope Francis on Monday said he promises to visit Lebanon, but has not considered the possibility of visiting the “beloved country of Syria.”

Speaking to the 75 journalists traveling with him on the papal flight from Baghdad to Rome at the end of his historic visit to Iraq, the pope revealed that Cardinal Bechara Rai, head of the Maronite Church, had asked him to make a stop in Beirut on his way back to the Vatican.

“But it seemed like a bit of a crumb (given) the problems of a country that is suffering like Lebanon,” the pope said.

He has promised to visit the country, “which despite its crisis is so generous in welcoming refugees,” according to a transcript of the news conference released by the Vatican Press Office upon his arrival in Rome.

The 84-year-old told the press corps that he got “very tired” during his intense visit to Iraq.

He described Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the top Shiite cleric whom he met on Saturday, as “a beacon” and “a person of wisdom, prudence, humility and respect.”

The pope said he was “honored to be welcomed by him,” adding: “I felt the duty to make this pilgrimage of faith and penance (in Iraq), and to go and see a great, wise man, a man of God.”

Pope Francis also spoke of his meeting on Sunday with the father of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian child who drowned off the coast of Turkey in 2015 while trying to enter Europe.

“Alan Kurdi is a symbol ... that goes beyond that of a child who died during migration. He is a symbol of civilization that is dying,” the pope said.

He added that urgent measures are needed so that people have work in their own countries and do not have to migrate, as well as measures to preserve the right to do so.

He noted the need for countries to receive and integrate migrants, singling out for thanks “generous” countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, which host millions of refugees.



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Chaldean leader: Pope's Iraq visit 'will leave great impact' After whirlwind historic visit, Pope leaving Iraq for Rome Father of drowned Syrian refugee boy Alan Kurdi meets pope in Iraq Pope in Iraq: Terror, death 'will never have the last word'

[Head of Yemen Red Cross criticized for meeting Iran's Houthi 'envoy'](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-08 21:46

AL-MUKALLA: The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) office in Yemen, Katharina Ritz, has been criticized for meeting Iran's representative in Houthi-controlled Sanaa.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak said Monday that the government had protested the meeting as Hasan Irlu was a member of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and had snuck into the country illegally last year.

"He (Irlu) is not an ambassador to Yemen," the minister told Arab News. "He has not been accredited and entered Yemen illegally. She is accredited in Yemen and is not entitled to meet with a member of the Revolutionary Guard to discuss matters related to Yemen."

The official Saba news agency reported that the ministry sent a "strongly worded" protest note to the ICRC about the meeting between Ritz and Irlu.

"The ministry is awaiting clarifications from the International Committee of the Red Cross about the circumstances of the mistake made by the Red Cross office (in Sanaa), and the ministry will take sovereign measures in accordance with Yemeni law," Saba quoted an anonymous ministerial source as saying.

The government has accused Irlu of masterminding military operations against its forces and facilitating the arrival of arms shipments from Iran to the Houthis.

In December, the US blacklisted Irlu for spearheading IRGC activities that fueled instability in Yemen.

The ICRC said Ritz met Irlu in her capacity as a representative of an independent humanitarian organization that talked to all parties and countries involved in the Yemen crisis and conflict.

"Humanitarian diplomacy is an integral part of ICRC activities to assist the people affected by the protracted conflict across the country," the organization said in an email to Arab News. "The ICRC has been working in Yemen since 1962 and it enjoys good acceptance and respect by all the Yemeni successive governments and all parties to the conflict."

Yemeni officials and activists went on social media to say that the organization should apologize to the Yemeni public for meeting a "terrorist" figure who sponsored the launch of attacks on civilians in the country and Saudi Arabia.

Yemen's ambassador to Morocco, Ezudding Al-Asbahi, said that Irlu was responsible for guiding the Houthi missiles that targeted Aden airport last December and killed dozens of civilians, including several ICRC workers.

"What can the international organization say to the victims," the ambassador tweeted.

The controversy came as Yemen's army on Monday announced fresh territorial gains in the southern city of Taiz after clashes with Houthis, local commanders and official media said.

Troops pushed into Maqbanah district after freeing Jabal Habashy district,

west of Taiz, as other forces liberated a number of locations on the eastern edges of the city, said Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a military official in Taiz.

“The army troops are pushing to completely seize control of Al-Bareh (so) as to meet government troops along with the country’s western coast,” Al-Baher told Arab News, attributing the Houthis’ setbacks in Taiz to severe attrition and sending their forces to Marib.

“The Houthi manpower has been greatly weakened over the last couple of months. This enabled the Yemeni army to advance in Taiz.”

Yemen’s defense minister said that Arab coalition warplanes had carried out dozens of air raids in the past 24 hours in the central province of Marib, targeting Houthi military equipment and locations in Al-Kasara, Helan and Serwah.

The strikes paved the way for the army and allied tribesmen to push back the attacks.

Last month the Houthis resumed a large-scale military offensive to seize control of oil-rich Marib city, which is the government’s last stronghold in the northern half of the country.

Local army commanders said that more than 1,000 Houthis, including many military leaders, had been killed since the start of the offensive.



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[Iran enriching uranium with third cascade of advanced IR-2M centrifuges: IAEA](#)

Mon, 2021-03-08 20:22

VIENNA: Iran has started enriching uranium with a third set of advanced IR-2m centrifuges at its underground plant at Natanz, the U.N. nuclear watchdog told its member states on Monday, a further breach of Tehran's 2015 deal with major powers.

The move is part of a recent acceleration by Iran of its violations of restrictions under that deal, which granted Iran relief from financial sanctions in return for curbs to its nuclear activities.

It began breaching limits after then-U.S. President Donald Trump quit the deal and re-imposed sanctions in 2018.

The acceleration of breaches appears aimed at raising pressure on Trump's successor Joe Biden. The new U.S. president wants to revive the accord, but Washington and Tehran are locked in a standoff over which side should move first.

The deal allows Iran to enrich uranium only with first-generation IR-1 centrifuges at the underground, commercial scale Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) at Natanz. In November Iran started enriching there with a first set of IR-2m machines, which are far more efficient, and has since been adding to it.

"On 7 March 2021, the Agency verified at FEP that: Iran had begun feeding natural UF₆ into the third cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges," the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report obtained by Reuters, referring to uranium hexafluoride, the form in which uranium is fed into centrifuges to purify it.

"The fourth cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges was installed but had yet to be fed with natural UF₆; installation of a fifth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges was ongoing; and installation of a sixth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges had yet to begin," it added.

In addition to its IR-1 machines, Iran is now using 522 IR-2m centrifuges to enrich uranium to up to 5% fissile purity at the FEP, the IAEA added.

That is more than the 3.67% purity allowed under the deal but less than the 20% it is enriching to at another facility, Fordow. Uranium enriched to 90% purity can be used to make an atomic weapon.



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UN atomic watchdog: Iran now operating Natanz centrifuges
Iran enriching uranium in second set of centrifuges in Natanz: IAEA

[Jordanian women have come a long way, but much work remains to be done](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-03-07 23:14

AMMAN: Despite improvements in the status of women in Jordan, more still

needs to be done to address gender-based violence and increase women's engagement in both society and the labor market, according to rights activists.

In remarks to Arab News on the occasion of International Women's Day, women's rights activists argued that Jordan has achieved "considerable" progress over the past 20 years in combating discrimination against women by revisiting laws and taking on the "social taboos" that keep Jordanian women out of the workforce.

They explained that these changes were the result of changes in society, underlining the need for more efforts at the institutional level toward improving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Rana Husseini, a renowned women's rights activist, said: "With regard to the achievements of the women's rights movement, I would say that one of the most important accomplishments was the appointment of women in decision-making positions such as ministers, criminal prosecutors, ambassadors and judges. Now, you see women almost everywhere. This is a sign that society is more open now toward accepting and wanting women to be in positions of leadership."

Despite changes to social structures and improvements in women's rights in Jordan, the award-winning journalist said there are still problems related to women's labor force participation and their employment status, citing the high unemployment rates among females.

According to official estimates, Jordan's unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2020 stood at 23.9 percent, up 4.8 percent compared with the same period of 2019. The rate of unemployed males who hold a bachelor's degree and higher reached 25.2 percent, while the percentage of unemployed females who hold at least the same degree increased to 77 percent.

"Despite efforts, economic participation among women is still weak," Husseini said, adding that there were still many jobs occupied exclusively by men.

"There is still discrimination in the workplace. Job owners prefer to hire men to get around issues related to maternity leave and childcare."

Honor crimes

On average, 10 to 15 women are killed annually in Jordan in the name of honor, Husseini said.

Husseini, who authored the hard-hitting book, "Murder in the Name of Honor," explained that the figure has seen a "significant drop."

"The number of the so-called 'honor crimes' reported in Jordan during the 1980s and 1990s was between 20 to 25, sometimes reaching 30 every year. Now, after all the work that has been done by activists, awareness campaigns, the government and all those involved in the fight, the number has dropped to 10 to 15 cases."

She explained that Jordan has amended laws related to violence against women, toughening penalties and thus reducing honor crimes.

“There have also been changes to some important clauses pertaining to violence against women, such as articles 98 and 308 of the penal code. Article 308 used to allow a person who sexually assaults a woman to escape punishment if he married the victim. Now, this is no longer the case. The other change is that perpetrators of so-called ‘honor crimes’ are not receiving lenient sentences as they used to in the past. Now, the criminal courts and justice system are really treating violence against women and children very seriously, and they are bringing cases to court with strong evidence to implicate the defendants.”

Husseini explained that Jordanian laws no longer allow a lenient sentence for perpetrators of honor crimes.

“But we still have a problem with the waiving of rights that families can exercise while at court to reduce the sentence.

“Violence against women is not a phenomenon specific to Jordan or the Middle East region but one that is found all over the world. The difference in our region is that women are killed by their families and relatives,” Husseini added.

COVID-19 pandemic

Jordanian women’s rights leaders said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated women’s troubles, worsening women’s economic participation and increasing gender-based violence.

According to the Sisterhood is Global Initiative (SIGI), an independent organization seeking women’s advancement and empowerment through a range of education and advocacy programs, many women have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and have been subject to domestic violence.

“The outbreak has proved the centrality of women in the society. The burdens of Jordanian women, especially those on the front lines, have increased during the pandemic, with many of them losing their jobs and suffering various forms of violence from their husbands, fathers and brothers. They have remained silent, in part to protect their families and children but also out of their deep belief that the current circumstances are exceptional and full of economic and social challenges,” SIGI said in a recent report.

Husseini said that lockdowns and curfews have been hindering NGOs and protection teams from performing regular check-up visits to vulnerable families and centers for victims of domestic violence and “family honor.”

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, UN Women said that emerging data and reports from those on the front lines have shown that all forms of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, have intensified.

A recent study by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia concluded that the pandemic is expected to result in the loss of 1.7 million

jobs in the Middle East region, including approximately 700,000 jobs held by women.



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Saudi Arabia reforms for women boost economic growth

Pope meets father of drowned Syrian refugee boy in Irbil

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IRBIL: Pope Francis has met with the father of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year old Syrian boy who drowned crossing the Mediterranean Sea and whose image drew global attention to the plight of refugees fleeing to Europe.

Following a Mass on Sunday in the Iraqi city of Erbil, Francis met with Abdullah Kurdi and spent a long time with him, the Vatican said.



Through an interpreter, the pope listened to Kurdi's story and expressed sympathy for the loss of his family. Abdullah thanked the pope for his words. The Kurdi family, who fled from Kobane in Syria, took the route of many Syrian and other migrants in 2015 by sea in a small boat from Turkey heading for Greece. When their boat capsized, Alan Kurdi, one of his brothers and his mother perished. The image of Alan's body, washed up on Turkish shores, came to symbolize the perilous journey to Europe and drew international condemnation. The father now runs a charity in Erbil.





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Pope in Iraq: Terror, death 'will never have the last word' AS IT HAPPENED:
Pope Francis visits Erbil, Mosul on third day of Iraq apostolic tour