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Pope urges peace in Easter message

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Vatican City - Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday urged peaceful solutions in the world's hot spots including Tibet, the Middle East and Africa during his traditional Easter message.

"How can we fail to remember certain African regions, such as Darfur and Somalia, the tormented Middle East, especially the Holy Land, Iraq, Lebanon, and finally Tibet, all of whom I encourage to seek solutions that will safeguard peace and the common good," the pope said in his "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message.

Speaking as pilgrims in Saint Peter's Square braved a steady rain, the 80-year-old head of the world's 1,1 billion Catholics wished that "the light that streams forth from this solemn day (may) shine forth in every part of the world."

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From the solemnity of Easter, "in which we relive the absolute, once-and-for-all experience of Jesus's resurrection, we receive an appeal to be converted to love; we receive an invitation to live by rejecting hatred and selfishness," Benedict said.

The pontiff then offered Easter greetings in 63 languages including Esperanto to the tens of thousands pilgrims in the rain-soaked square and millions of others watching live broadcasts in 67 countries.

On Wednesday the pope broke his silence on the crisis in Tibet, calling for an end to violence there and urging "dialogue and tolerance."

Beijing brushed off the appeal, according to Italian press reports that quoted foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang as saying Thursday: "Supposed tolerance cannot exist for criminals who should be punished by the law."

Earlier the pope celebrated an open-air mass to mark the holiest day of the Christian calendar.

While the pope and his co-celebrants were sheltered from the rain by a huge canopy in front of Saint Peter's Basilica, Benedict said to the pilgrims huddled under umbrellas: "Let's consider (the rain) as a gift of God."

Benedict chose the white and gold vestments and gold mitre of Benedict XV, his namesake who reigned from 1914 to 1922, for the occasion.

Religious freedom has been a theme of this year's Easter celebrations. At Saturday's Easter vigil, the pope baptised a former Muslim and a critic of Islamic extremism, journalist Magdi Allam.

Good Friday's Way of the Cross procession was marked by meditations penned by outspoken Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, who referred to the "martyrs" among China's tiny Catholic minority.

Zen is a key figure for Asian Catholics including those in China who are split between the official and clandestine Catholic churches.

Allam, 55, an editorial writer and deputy publisher of the Corriere della Sera newspaper, wrote a letter to the paper published



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