



Speaking to a group that assists Eastern Christian Churches, Pope Francis warns of the risk that Christians could be eliminated from the Middle East.

“The Middle East today is a crossroads of difficult situations, suffering,” Pope Francis said on Friday, in unscripted remarks to representatives of ROACO, the Reunion of Aid Agencies to the Oriental Churches (Italian: *Riunione Opere Aiuto Chiese Orientali*). ROACO coordinates assistance and provides funding for initiatives that aid Eastern Catholic Churches.

In his extemporaneous comments, Pope Francis warned that there is the risk of “eliminating Christians” from the Middle East although he was careful to say that this did not mean this was anyone’s intention.

Though the Middle East is suffering, he continued, the great powers of the world are not concerned with the culture, the faith, or the life of the people of that region; instead, they are concerned only “to take a piece and have greater domination.” Meanwhile, the number of Christians is continually decreasing.

He praised the work of ROACO in assisting the Christians in the Middle East, saying it is important to preserve, and fight for, the great traditions of Eastern Christianity, which are like the sap “that comes from the roots to give life to our soul.”

He lamented the “great sin” in the Middle East: the desire for power, the sin of war. “And the people, the children, suffer,” he said, pointing especially to the lack of schools and hospitals.

But he also pointed out “our own sin” in the Middle East, the sin “of incoherence between life and faith.” Although he said only a few people are guilty of these sins, he nonetheless called on all Christians, but especially priests and religious, to be consistent in the practice of the faith they preach.

Despite all these problems, Pope Francis said, "The Lord will not leave us by ourselves." And so, he concluded, "I say that the Middle East is a hope: a hope that we must cultivate."