THE HUMANITARIAN APPROACH AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE IDENTITY OF THE ROHINGYA SHOULD NOT BE SEPARABLE

AVİM

Pope Francis made an Apostolic visit to Myanmar and to Bangladesh from 27 November to 2 December 2017. According to the declaration made by Greg Burke, Director of the Holy See Press Office the visits are made upon the invitations by the respective heads of state and bishops of the two countries. He visited the cities of Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar and Dhaka in Bangladash. [1]

It is very interesting to note that in each of his visits, the Vatican designs a logo for Pope Francis. For the Myanmar trip the Vatican has designed an interesting logo. The trip Logo clearly has the motto engraved Love & Peace.

According to Vatican the Logo states the following:

The logo for his visit to Myanmar depicts Pope Francis releasing a white dove from within a heart drawn in the colors of Myanmars flag: yellow, green, and red. An outline of Myanmars landmass sits beside the Pope within the heart, while the motto for his journey is shown above: Love & Peace.[2]

Despite this peace message in the logo of his trip to Myanmar neither before his trip nor during the trip has Pope Franscis made mention of the Rohingya Muslims except his pronunciation. of the word Rohingya during his visit to Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka. Here we must look at several indicators as to why Pope Francis might have made this crucial omission. One of these indicators is an interview given by the editor-in-chief of the Asia News service press agency of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. [3]

According to a interview given to National Public Radio Service (NPR) by editor in chief, Bernardo Cervellera the local church leaders had advised Pope Francis not to utter the name of Rohingya's. The local church leaders feared reprisals by Buddhist fundamentalists.[4]

Many individuals and organizations in the World point to the fact that Pope Francis has missed an important opportunity in Myanmar, especially during his meeting with Prime Minister Aung San Suu Kyi, when he did not mention the Rohingya Muslims.

Among them, is Phil Robertson, the deputy director of Human Rights Watchs Asia division.

He said it quite well when he argued the following: Rohingya have been stripped of so many things but their name should never be one of them.[5]

Some however like the EUs Ambassador to Myanmar Kristian Schmidt have defended the speech of Pope Francis. She argued that it was unnecessary for Pope Francis to talk directly about the crisis. She stated He didnt need to. It was written all over the speech, between the lines ☀ It doesnt have to be about specific words. It was all about values. And on values it was absolutely eloquent and strong.

We wonder if the Pope or the EU Ambassador would have taken the same position if the persecuted minority would have been Christian? If the burned villages would have belonged to Christian groups.Whether speaking between the lines would have been enough? Even western journalists now accept that Pope Francis and Vatican feared the Buddhist majority actions towards Christian minority and thus decided not to mention the name of Rohingya Muslims.[6]

Everybody expected him to come to the aid of Rohingya Muslims at the Bangladesh leg of his trip. Some say he came closer at the second leg of his trip to saying Rohingya. Yet saying refugees from Rakhine State is not the same thing as Rohingya's. He did praise Bangladesh for helping the nameless refugees from the Rakhine state.

Most probably because of the severe criticisms, at the very end of his Asia tour, he felt obliged to refer to Rohingya people at least once by their name. He also pronounced their name on the way back to Rome on the plane. The Pope is considered only accountable for his actions before the God. It seems that when the plight of Muslim people is of the subject matter his diplomatic and political identity very easily overrides religious one. In fact, in his Asia visit he missed a chance to stand against injustice which many countries are turning a blind eye because of commercial interests or because of the strategic importance of Myanmar. It would have been meaningful and most welcome for the apostolic visit to pay more attention to all aspects of the sufferings of these helpless people.

**Photo: https://gdb.voanews.com*

[1]Pope Francis to Visit Myanmar, Bangladesh in November (Radio Vatican, August 28, 2017), http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/08/28/pope_francis_to_visit_myanmar,_bangladesh_in_november/1333158.

[2] Vatican Releases Logos for Pope Francis Visit to Bangladesh, Myanmar, *Radio Vatican*, August 28, 2017, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/08/28/logos_for_popes_visit_to_bangladesh,_myanmar/1333179.

[3] About Us, *Asia News Agency*, March 12, 2003, http://www.asianews.it/en.html.

[4] Pope Francis to Visit Myanmar, Bangladesh in November.

[5] Poppy McPherson, Pope Francis Fails to Mention Rohingya in Myanmar Speech, *Guardian*, November 28, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/28/pope-francis-to-meet-aung-san-suu-kyi-on-first-full-day-in-myanmar.

[6] Joanna Moorhead, By Not Saying Rohingya, Pope Francis Was Just Protecting His Own, *Guardian*, November 28, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/28/pope-francis-catholics-rohingya.

About the Author :

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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