

Headline	Pope sees hope in Africa		
MediaTitle	Daily Express (KK)		
Date	22 Nov 2011	Color	Full Color
Section	World	Circulation	30,557
Page No	14	Readership	97,836
Language	English	ArticleSize	142 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 732
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 2,196



## Pope sees hope in Africa

COTONOU: Pope Benedict XVI ended his second visit to Africa on Sunday after a trip that saw him present the continent's Catholic Church as a source of hope at a time of waning faith in parts of the West.

Several times during his three-day trip to the West African country of Benin, a voodoo heartland as well as a bastion of Catholicism, he spoke of the potential for Africa's Catholics to re-energise the Church.

"It is a continent for which I have a special regard and affection, for I am deeply convinced that it is a land of hope," the 84-year-old German-born pope said just before departing on Sunday.

"Here are found authentic values which have much to teach our world. They need only to spread and to blossom with God's help and the determination of Africans themselves."

While widely seen as lacking the charisma of his predecessor John Paul II

who visited 41 countries in Africa, including Benin twice—Benedict received a joyous welcome throughout the visit and often seemed reinvigorated by it.

He celebrated mass for an estimated 50,000 people at a stadium on Sunday while some 30,000 others watched on giant screens outside.

"Benedict XVI has a straight speaking style," said Laurent, 32, calling himself "overwhelmed with joy" over his visit.

"He tells us that our culture can prosper through the Church, that Christ takes nothing from us and gives us everything."

The pope managed to avoid the kind of controversy that derailed his first African trip to Cameroon and Angola in 2009, when his suggestion that condom distribution aggravated the AIDS problem caused a global outcry. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to



Pope Benedict

nearly 70 percent of the world's HIV cases.

Africa, in addition to being the world's most rapidly growing continent, also has the world's fastest-growing number of Catholics. Benedict spoke of the hopes of the continent's youthful population.

But he also addressed faults to a certain degree, with African churches hit

by scandals ranging from priests having affairs to corruption, as well as the fusion of traditional beliefs and Catholicism.

The trip was heavily symbolic, particularly his journey to the city of Ouidah, a centre of voodoo and home to an important Catholic seminary.

It was in Ouidah where he signed off on a roadmap for the Roman Catholic Church in Africa—an apostolic exhortation called "The Pledge for Africa"—addressing the themes of justice, peace and reconciliation.

He signed the document at a basilica there, with a voodoo Temple of Pythons just across the street.

Ouidah had also served as a major slave-trading port. Slaves departing from the city and elsewhere took their traditional voodoo beliefs with them and transplanted them in the Americas.

In addition, Benedict's visit came 150 years after what is considered the evangelisation of Benin by missionaries.

He had cited Benin's democratic development and relatively peaceful cohabitation of religions in explaining reasons for visiting the country of some nine million people, which also has a sizeable Muslim population.

"Why should an African country not show the rest of the world the path to be taken towards living an authentic fraternity in justice, based on the greatness of the family and of labour?" he said before his departure.—AFP