

---

## New Caledonia, Christian churches' plea for peace: “The island closest to paradise has become the island closest to hell”

“The island closest to paradise has become the island closest to hell.” Speaking at Pentecost Mass, Monsignor Michel-Marie Calvet, Catholic Archbishop of Nouméa, read out a heartfelt plea for peace released by the Christian Churches of New Caledonia, calling for an end to the violence in the country, while roads remain littered with rubble and armoured vehicles patrol the city. Churches have been closed for days for security reasons. Strict measures were announced last Friday in the framework of a state of emergency, which will remain in place for at least 11 days, with a curfew from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. An estimated 1,000 police officers from Paris have been deployed to quell the riots. Six people were killed, including two police officers. The latest casualties were recorded on Friday night in a shootout in the vicinity of a barricade set up by the demonstrators. It is the most serious outbreak of violence in New Caledonia since the 1980s, and the boulevards of Noumea have been turned into battlefields.

"Let's sound a strong signal to say no to violence. It will only lead to more violence, more unhappiness and more tears," the Churches said in their joint appeal.

**“We urgently plead for an immediate end to the violence,”** the message reads. “We call upon our elected representatives to work together for a common future of harmony and peace, for lost and recovered fraternity. Let us draw from our prayers to the Holy Spirit the strength to believe in the power of love that shatters the force of violence and hatred, so that fraternity, harmony and peace may finally and forever reign on this planet where we all live.” “In the tragic hours that our country has been experiencing since the beginning of the week,” the Churches continue in their statement, “in the face of the unspeakable and incalculable destruction that has occurred and is still unfolding before our eyes, in the face of broken lives, we Christians cannot remain silent spectators of the hurricane that is raging in our midst. We must do our part to give peace a chance.” **The French Bishops' Conference intervened from Paris by inviting "all Catholics to join in the prayer of the Christian churches of New Caledonia."** “May the political leaders rediscover the path of dialogue and mutual trust," is the bishops' hope. "This crisis shows that much work remains to be done in order to build a future favourable to all". **For decades, tensions have been high between the Kanaks, who want independence, and the descendants of the settlers, who want the island to remain part of France.** New Caledonia has long served as France's prison colony and now has a French military base on the island. The protests were sparked by the indigenous community's strong opposition to changes to the French constitution, which were agreed and approved by French lawmakers last Tuesday. The amendments allow residents of the archipelago who have lived there for 10 years to vote in provincial elections. Supporters of independence argue that this change will further marginalise the Kanak community, which makes up around 40 per cent of the population. **This shows that the process of reconciliation between France and the indigenous peoples of the Archipelago is still far from having been completed.** The prayer for peace and reconciliation, which was read out in all the churches yesterday, reads as follows: “We promised to build a future of peace and fraternity, to live together in harmony. Lord, we have failed.” “We have tried to prevail, to impose our perspective and our understanding onto others. In the process we caused undue misunderstanding, injustice, pain, sadness and tears. In light of the terrible violence that has defined this tragic week of May 2024, we hereby declare that we will not pursue this path of rejection ever again.” Hence the call to “return to extending our hands, shaking hands in a gesture of peace.”