

Pope hints at a trip to South Sudan with Anglican leader by Reuters



Pope Francis attends All Saints' Anglican Church in Rome, Italy February 26, 2017. REUTERS/Alessandro Bianchi

Pope Francis said on Sunday he wants to make a trip to South Sudan together with the head of the Anglican Church to bring attention to the suffering of people stricken by civil war and famine.

Francis made the disclosure in impromptu comments during a visit to Rome's Anglican church, the first to the parish by a pope, to mark the 200th anniversary of its opening.

"My aides and I are studying the possibility of a trip to South Sudan," the pope said in response to a question about Christian Churches in Africa.

He recalled that last October the Catholic, Episcopalian and Presbyterian bishops came to Rome to discuss the situation in their country and invited him to visit.

Francis said they told him "but don't come alone, come with Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury". Welby is spiritual head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, which counts about 85 million members and is the world's third-largest Christian denomination.

"The situation is a bit ugly down there but we have to do it because the three of them (the local bishops from different churches) together want peace and they are working together for peace," Francis said.

Oil-producing South Sudan, which became independent in 2011, descended into civil war in December 2013 when a dispute between President Salva Kiir and his sacked deputy Riek Machar ended with fighting, often occurring along ethnic lines. Both sides have targeted civilians, human rights groups say.

Kiir's government declared a famine in some part of the country last week.

South Sudan has been hit by the same east African drought that has pushed Somalia back to the brink of famine, six years after 260,000 people starved to death in 2011.

Francis said the trip would likely last just one day, which Vatican sources have said would be for security reasons. Francis gave no indication when it could take place but sources have said it would be this year.

(Reporting By Philip Pulella; Editing by Dominic Evans)