

New Jersey man pleads guilty to plotting attack on pope during 2015 visit

By Matthew Gambino

Catholic News Service

PHILADELPHIA - A New Jersey teen pleaded guilty April 3 of plotting an attack on Pope Francis during the pontiff's visit to Philadelphia in 2015 during the World Meeting of Families.

Santos Colon Jr., 17, of Lindenwold in Camden County, pleaded guilty in a New Jersey federal court to one count of attempting to provide material support to terrorists.

Court documents show Colon admitted to acting under the name Ahmad Shakoore in support of the Islamic State, though it is not clear whether he was in communication with the terrorist group.

In a statement, the U.S. Department of Justice said that in 2015, Colon planned between June 30 and Aug. 14 to utilize a sniper to shoot the pope during his public Sunday Mass Sept. 27 on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia. He also planned to set off bombs in the surrounding area.

Up to several hundred thousand people were in attendance on the parkway that day as the concluding Mass to the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia and the first apostolic visit of Pope Francis to the United States was celebrated without incident.

Colon, a U.S. citizen and only 15 years old at the time, solicited someone he thought would be the sniper in the plot but who actually was an undercover FBI agent.

Colon scouted the area of the planned attack and instructed the agent "to purchase materials to make explosive devices," the Justice Department said in its statement.

Colon was arrested in 2015 about two weeks before the papal visit.

Pleading guilty as an adult, he faces a maximum of 15 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. No date was set for sentencing.

According to his plea statement, Colon reportedly has in the past received treatment in a mental health institution.

Also see:

Georgetown sets date to rename buildings honoring a slave, black teacher

