

Pope sends cardinal to South Sudan to urge peace

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Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis sent a high-ranking cardinal to South Sudan to urge a peaceful end to the escalating violence in the country.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, met with President Salva Kiir in the capital, Juba, July 19 and delivered two letters on the pope's behalf — one addressed to the nation's president and another to the vice president.

The cardinal said the letters, which the pope gave to him prior to his departure to Juba, contained a message calling for peace in the country.

The pope's message "can be summarized like so: 'Enough now, enough with this conflict,'" Cardinal Turkson told Vatican Radio July 20.

The Ghanaian cardinal noted that "the speed with which the pope reacted to the need of sending a message of solidarity and to call for peace is amazing."

"Speaking to him some time ago, he told me, 'I want to go.' These difficult situations are always in the Holy Father's heart," the cardinal said.

According to SIR, the Italian bishops' news agency, a local missionary priest confirmed the pope's concern for the increasing violence in the country.

"We know that Pope Francis is following every evolution (of the crisis) very closely. Cardinal Peter Turkson was sent by the pope here in these days to us in Juba," said Italian Comboni Father Daniele Moschetti, superior of the Comboni Missionaries in Juba.

For nearly a year, South Sudan has been trying to emerge from a civil war caused by political rivalry between Vice President Riek Machar and Kiir, who represent different ethnic groups. Violent clashes spread across the city and left tens of thousands of people dead since the beginning of their rivalry in December 2013.

Although a cease-fire is currently in effect in Juba, Father Moschetti said the threat of violence continues to loom large over the people and the church, which includes 350 local and international missionaries.

"The climate, including toward the church, is changing: We are all at risk," SIR reported him as saying.

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