Vatican
News



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Pope Francis appears set to order the opening of the Vatican's first permanent embassy in South Sudan in a gesture of solidarity with a country that has suffered a devastating civil war since 2013.

The bishops' conference for Sudan and South Sudan announced the move in a release June 6, saying it had received word from the Vatican's Secretariat of State that Kenyan Msgr. Mark Kadima would shortly be named as South Sudan's first resident apostolic nuncio.

"I express to His Holiness heartfelt gratitude," said Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, president of the conference. "This step of our Holy Father truly cools the hearts of downtrodden war victims in these nations and ... symbolizes the honest friendly ties between South Sudan and the Holy See."

South Sudan has had an apostolic nuncio, or Vatican ambassador, since 2013 in Archbishop Charles Balvo. But Balvo, who is originally from New York, has conducted his work from Nairobi, Kenya.

Kadima has been serving as an official in Brazil's apostolic nunciature. At publication time, the Vatican press office had not yet responded to a request for comment on

Kussala's announcement.

Granted independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan has been in a state of civil war since 2013, when a political struggle broke out during which an estimated 300,000 people have died and some 3 million have been displaced.

Francis had originally planned to make a joint visit to South Sudan in 2017 with Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, but the trip was indefinitely postponed due to apparent safety and organizational concerns.

Kussala, who leads the rural diocese of Tombura-Yambio about 300 miles west of the South Sudanese capital of Juba, said in the June 6 release that people in his country continue to be "committed to praying to God to make the papal visit happen."

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Apostolic nuncios are known in many places for the dedication they bring to their work, and even choosing to remain in post when conditions in their host countries become dangerous or unstable.

One nuncio has been killed in recent memory: Irish Archbishop Michael Courtney, who was ambushed by gunmen in 2003 while representing the Holy See in Burundi. He was replaced in his post by British Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who now serves as the Vatican's foreign minister.

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