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An older white man wearing a clerical collar stands behind a podium that says COP27 Egypt a

In this file photo, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, addresses COP27, the 27th Conference of the Parties of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Nov. 8, 2022. (CNS screenshot/UNFCCC)

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Vatican City — December 1, 2023
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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, will deliver Pope Francis' speech to the U.N. climate conference, COP28, and will help inaugurate a faith pavilion after the pope canceled his trip due to health concerns.

The pope had been scheduled to attend the climate conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Dec. 1-3, which would have made him the first pope to attend one of the global gatherings that began in 1995.

Francis had been scheduled to be the first speaker Dec. 2, addressing the high-level World Climate Action Summit for heads of states and government. Afterward, he was to hold private bilateral meetings with about 30 government leaders and activists, whom the Vatican had not identified. The pope was then to join other faith leaders in

inaugurating the first "Faith Pavilion" at a U.N. climate conference Dec. 3.

Following the advice of his doctors, the pope canceled the trip late Nov. 28 after coming down with a serious bronchial infection requiring antibiotic treatment. The pope had told a group of health care managers Nov. 30 that he did not have a fever, but he had respiratory difficulties and did not have the energy to do much talking.

Matteo Bruni, head of the Vatican press office, confirmed Dec. 1 that Parolin would be reading the pope's address Dec. 2 and would lead the Holy See delegation, which was already in Dubai to attend the entire conference Nov. 30-Dec. 12. According to the conference's final schedule, Parolin was to be the 29th speaker Dec. 2, addressing the summit after U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and immediately after Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

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Parolin had told reporters Nov. 29 he has attended every U.N. climate change conference since 2015 in Paris. He usually attends just the early sessions, while the main delegation remains, and he expected it would be the same for Dubai, according to Vatican News Nov. 29.

Bruni said in his written communique that Parolin and Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso, prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, would attend the inauguration of the Faith Pavilion Dec. 3.

Parolin said it was unfortunate the pope's planned bilateral meetings would not be held. "There were many political figures who had asked to see the pope," he said.

"Unfortunately, it is not possible," and the meetings scheduled with the pope would be canceled, he said.

"But it is a good sign that there had been so many people who had wanted to see the pope," the cardinal said. The pope "is sorry it is not possible," and the cardinal said efforts will be made to make up for it.