

The Christian leaders have sent a Christmas greeting to South Sudan's political leaders, urging them to go further in seeking peace.



The Archbishop of Canterbury has joined with Pope Francis and the Church of Scotland Moderator, the Revd Martin Fair, to send a Christmas greeting to South Sudan's political leaders and urge them to continue seeking peace.

In their joint letter, they welcome the "small progress" the leaders have made but say it is "not enough" for the people of South Sudan.

They remind the political leaders of their commitments made at the Vatican in April 2019 to bring South Sudan to a smooth implementation of the Peace Agreement. They also restate their commitment to making a joint visit to the country.

The leaders write: "We remain prayerfully mindful of the commitments made at the Vatican in April 2019 – yours to bring your country to a smooth implementation of the Peace Agreement, and ours to visit South Sudan in due course, as things return to normalcy."

"We have been glad to see the small progress you have made, but know it is not enough for your people to feel the full effect of peace. When we visit, we long to bear witness to a changed nation, governed by leaders who, in the words of the Holy Father last year, 'hold hands, united... as simple citizens' to 'become Fathers (and Mothers) of the Nation'."

They add: "We pray, this Christmas, that you will know greater trust among yourselves and a greater generosity of service to your people. We pray you know the peace that surpasses understanding in your own hearts and in the heart of your great nation (Philippians 4:7)."

At the request of Pope Francis, ~~Archbishop Justin Welby led a spiritual retreat~~ for South Sudan's most senior political and church leaders at the Vatican in April 2019.

In a dramatic gesture at the end of the retreat, Pope Francis knelt before the leaders of South Sudan's government and opposition, kissing their shoes and urging them to pursue peace. "Remember that with war, all is lost," the Pope said.

Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin announced in November 2019 that they intend to make an unprecedented joint visit to South Sudan.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 but descended into a brutal civil war in December 2013. In an attempt to end the conflict, the country's president, Salva Kiir, and opposition leaders, including Dr Riek Machar, signed a peace deal in 2018 and agreed to form a unity government.

The full text of the letter follows:

Your Excellencies,

In this Christmas season, we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world among the least – in a dusty stable with animals. Later, he called those who wish to be great in his kingdom to be the servant of all (Mark 10:43).

We remain prayerfully mindful of the commitments made at the Vatican in April 2019 – yours to bring your country to a smooth implementation of the Peace Agreement, and ours to visit South Sudan in due course, as things return to normalcy. We have been glad to see the small progress you have made, but know it is not enough for your people to feel the full effect of peace. When we visit, we long to bear witness to a changed nation, governed by leaders who, in the words of the Holy Father last year, 'hold hands, united... as simple citizens' to 'become Fathers (and Mothers) of the Nation'.

We pray, this Christmas, that you will know greater trust among yourselves and a greater generosity of service to your people. We pray you know the peace that surpasses understanding in your own hearts and in the heart of your great nation (Philippians 4:7).



Their Excellencies

The Political Leaders of South Sudan

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