

Pope Francis says laws criminalising LGBT people are a 'sin' and an injustice

By Philip Pullella

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Pope Francis said on Sunday that laws criminalising LGBT people are a sin and an injustice because God loves and accompanies people with same-sex attraction.



Pope Francis addresses the media while aboard the plane from Juba to Rome, returning from his visit to Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, 5 February 2023. Vatican Media/Handout via Reuters

Francis, who made his remarks in response to a reporter's question aboard the Papal Plane returning from a two-country trip to Africa, received full backing of his comments from two other Christian leaders on the plane with him.

"The criminalisation of homosexuality is a problem that cannot be ignored," said Francis, who then cited unnamed statistics according to which 50 countries criminalise LGBT people "in one way or another" and about 10 others have laws including the death penalty for them.

Sixty-six UN member states continue to criminalise consensual same-sex sexual relations, according to data from ILGA World – the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. In several countries where same-sex relations are illegal, punishments can include a possible death penalty.

"This is not right. Persons with homosexual tendencies are children of God. God loves them. God accompanies them ... condemning a person like this is a sin. Criminalising people with homosexual tendencies is an injustice," Francis said.

He noted that the Catholic Church's catechism, or book of teachings, says same-sex attraction is not a sin but homosexual acts are. It also says that LGBT people should not be marginalised.

Francis mentioned his now-famous phrase from soon after he became pope in 2013 that he could not judge people with same-sex tendencies who are seeking God. He also noted that while visiting Ireland in 2018 he said that parents could not disown their LGBT children, but had to keep them in a loving family.

Support from Christian leaders

The pope made the trip to South Sudan, the second country on the tour, as a peace pilgrimage with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Iain Greenshields.

Both Christian leaders were on the plane returning from there and participated in the pope's customary news conference with reporters, a first on any papal trip.

Both praised the pope's comments.

"I entirely agree with every word he said there," Welby said, noting that the Anglican communion was itself divided over gay rights and that two resolutions against criminalisation of LGBT people "have not really changed many people's minds".

Welby added: "I shall certainly quote the Holy Father. He said it so beautifully and accurately".

Expressing his own support of Francis, Greenshields referred to the Bible, saying:

"There is nowhere in my reading of the four Gospels where I see Jesus turning anyone away. There is nowhere in the four Gospels that I see anything other than Jesus expressing love to whoever he meets and as Christians that is the only expression that we can give to any human being in any circumstance".

Francis repeated that the Catholic Church cannot permit sacramental marriage of same-sex couples but that he supported so-called civil union legislation giving same-sex couples legal protection in issues such as pensions, inheritance and health care.

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