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Pope Says Meeting With Russian Orthodox Patriarch Scrapped

By AFP

April 22, 2022



Pope Francis. **Christoph Wagener (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Pope Francis has announced that a meeting set for June with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, has been canceled so as not to sow "confusion."

The two men, who had a first, historic, meeting in Cuba in 2016, had been due for further talks in Jerusalem.

But Francis told Argentina's La Nacion newspaper the encounter was called off because "our diplomacy felt that a meeting at this time could lead to a lot of confusion" — an allusion to the Ukraine war.

The head of the Catholic Church insisted his ties with Kirill, who represents some 150 million faithful or half the world's Orthodox population, were "very good."

Their meeting in 2016 was the first between the leaders of the two biggest Christian

denominations in nearly a thousand years.

Dialogue with the Orthodox Church, which separated from the Catholic Church in 1054, is a stated priority of Francis's pontificate.

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But since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the two men have been on opposing sides.

The Pope last week called for peace and denounced a "cruel and senseless war."

Kirill has defended Putin's "military operation" and the fight against Russia's "external and internal enemies."

The two men held video talks on Ukraine in March and urged negotiations for a "just peace."

Yet shortly after the start of the war, Kirill called Moscow's opponents in Ukraine "evil forces."

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