

Williams visits Zimbabwe amid church-state standoff

News

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HARARE, Zimbabwe (RNS/ENInews) Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams will visit Zimbabwe in a show of support for Anglicans who are under siege from a renegade ex-bishop who plans to snub the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Anglicans in Zimbabwe are embroiled in a church property fight with former Bishop Nolbert Kunonga of the capital of Harare. Kunonga left the church in 2007 over what he said was its pro-gay stance.

Kunonga has formed his own church around a group of followers, claiming rights over church property, schools and hospitals. Kunonga is allied with President Robert Mugabe, who has maintained a tight grip on power for 30 years.

Williams' Oct. 5-13 visit, which will include visits to Malawi and Zambia, will "show support to Anglicans in Zimbabwe in the face of ongoing persecution at the hands of an ex-communicated man who has nothing else to do than focus his attention on destroying what generations of Anglicans built using their own resources," the Harare diocese said in a statement.

Kunonga called Williams "a British diplomat representing neo-colonial interests," and said he has little interest in meeting with him.

"I can't be in solidarity with him. He won't solve anything," he said. "Other people are seeing hope. They are seeing Jesus Christ coming."

Williams has said he has asked for a meeting with Mugabe, whom critics accuse of using police and the courts to intimidate clergy, staff and worshippers.

Anglicans recognize another prelate, Chad Gandiya, as bishop of Harare. "Zimbabweans should know that they are not forgotten by the global church," said Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of Cape Town, South Africa.

(Reporting was contributed by Munyaradzi Makoni in Cape Town, South Africa.)