

Church of England's call for dialogue on gays rebuffed in Africa

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(RNS) Ahead of his five-day visit to Africa, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby issued a statement reminding Anglicans of the commitment the Church of England made eight years ago to the pastoral care and support of everyone, including gays and lesbians.

So far, the archbishop's statement has not convinced African leaders.

On Wednesday (Jan. 29), Anglican leaders in Africa rejected a proposal by the English College of Bishops for two-year "facilitated conversations" to address the differences over homosexuality within the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Kenya's Archbishop Eliud Wabukala, chairman of the Global African Future Conference Primates' Council, said the move would project the Church of England's problems onto the communion as a whole.

"Without clear understanding of biblical authority and interpretation, such dialogue will spread confusion and open doors for false interpretation of the gospel," said Wabukala in a pastoral letter. "I cannot commend the proposal."

The archbishop's letter, co-written with Ugandan-born Archbishop of York John Sentamu, referred to gay men and women as the "children of God."

Welby is visiting South Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Earlier this month, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan signed new laws making homosexual acts punishable with 14 years in prison. The Ugandan parliament also

recently approved a bill increasing the punishment for gay sex. So far, President Yoweri Museveni has refused to sign the bill into law.

Wabukala termed the College of Bishops' proposal deeply disturbing, given the intensive debate within the communion on the subject.

"The underlying problem is whether or not there is a willingness to accept the Bible for what it is, the word of God," said Wabukala.

In Uganda, Anglican Archbishop Stanley Ntagali said in a statement that homosexuality is incompatible with Scripture.