

Dalai Lama says Pope Francis is unwilling to meet: 'It could cause problems'

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ROME (RNS) The Dalai Lama said Thursday (December 11) that he would not meet Pope Francis while in Rome for a summit of Nobel Peace Prize winners.

"The Vatican administration says it is not possible because it could cause problems," the Dalai Lama said, hinting that the Vatican may be unwilling to irk China, a country with which it wants to engage and perhaps re-establish diplomatic relations.

But the Vatican's chief spokesman, Federico Lombardi, declined to say whether the pope had personally turned down a request for a meeting with the spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists.

"Pope Francis obviously holds the Dalai Lama in very high regard, but he will not be meeting any of the Nobel laureates," Lombardi told journalists.

The Dalai Lama advocates greater rights for Tibet, a region China annexed in 1950. In 1959, he led a failed uprising against the Chinese government there and fled to India, where he is now based.

The Dalai Lama had a brief meeting with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in October 2006 but was not granted papal audiences during previous visits he made to Rome in 2007 and 2009, according to the Italian wire service ANSA.

The Vatican has not had diplomatic ties with China since 1951, and its Communist leaders object to meetings between heads of state and the Tibetan leader.

En route to South Korea in August, Pope Francis sent greetings to the Chinese, as customary when the pope flies over a foreign country. He also hinted at the possibility of closer relations if the Communist leaders gave Catholics more rights and allowed the Vatican to appoint bishops there.

Lombardi said the pope would send a message to the three-day summit of Nobel winners.