

Catholic Churches Vandalized in Chile, as Pope's Visit Approaches



Santiago, January 13 (RHC)--Protesters have vandalized several Catholic churches in Chile in the face of Pope Francis' visit to the country next week, and warned they will target the Catholic leader with a "bomb".

Demonstrators used firebombs to attack four churches in the capital Santiago on Friday, leaving behind a note warning the pope: "The next bomb will be in your robe," according to Latin American broadcaster Telesur.

Authorities have said they are investigating the incidents, which caused no injuries, though they have yet to make any arrests.

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet described the attacks as "very strange" and said authorities had been unable to tie the incidents to a "particular group" so far, Telesur reported.

"In a democracy, people can express themselves as long as it's done in a peaceful way," Bachelet said, and called for a "climate of respect" during the pope's upcoming visit.

Chile's president-elect, Sebastian Piñeira, condemned the attacks in a statement on Twitter.

"The hatred and intolerance cannot prevail above the respect and the rule of law," he said on Friday.

He added that Chile would receive the pope "with joy and peace".

Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, is due to arrive in Chile on Monday.

He is scheduled to hold mass on Tuesday in a Santiago park, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to attend.

Pope Francis, born in Argentina, will also visit the Chilean cities of Temuco, where he is expected to meet Mapuches, and Iquique, before travelling to Peru.

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