

Pope Francis has apologized to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan for postponing his July visits to the two countries indefinitely for health reasons.

He had planned to visit the DR Congo cities of Kinshasa and Goma on 2 to 5 July before traveling to the South Sudanese capital, Juba, for a two-day trip.

However, the Vatican announced the postponement on Friday due to the 85-year-old pontiff's knee problem.

The pope told thousands of people in St Peter's Square that "with great regret, due to problems with my leg, I have had to postpone my visit to your countries".

He expressed hope that he will reschedule the visits "as soon as possible".

The pope used a wheelchair for the first time at a public event in May due to reported pain in his right knee and has had to postpone a scheduled trip to Lebanon this month.