

Vatican report calls for reparations for sex abuse victims

Tougher sanctions sought for abusers

BY NICOLE WINFIELD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican’s child protection board said Thursday the Catholic Church has a moral obligation to help victims of clergy sexual abuse heal. Financial reparations for the abused and tougher sanctions for the abusers and their enablers are essential remedies, it said.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors focused on the issue of reparations in its second annual report — an often sensitive topic for the church, given the financial, reputational and legal implications involved.

The report was significant — an official Vatican publication prepared with the input of 40 abuse survivors from around the world. It gave a voice to their complaints of how badly the church had handled their cases and highlighted measures they need to heal.

It contained the shocking revelation that the Vatican office responsible for one-third of the world’s Catholic dioceses had received only a “small number of cases,” and only two reports of bishops who covered up child sex crimes. Such data suggests that clergy abuse is happening unchecked and unreported in vast parts of the developing world, more than three decades after the scandal first exploded publicly in the West.



Pope Leo XIV presides over a Rosary vigil for peace in St. Peter's Square on the 63rd anniversary of the start of the Second Vatican Council, at the Vatican, on Saturday.

POPE LEO SIGNALS COMMITMENT TO COMMISSION

The report covers 2024, a period before Pope Leo XIV was elected. History’s first American pope has acknowledged that the abuse scandal remains a “crisis” for the church.

Leo has signaled a commitment to the commission, which Pope Francis created in 2014 to advise the church on best practices to prevent abuse.

The report said monetary set-

tlements were necessary to provide victims with needed therapy and other assistance to help them recover from the trauma of their abuse.

But it said the church owed a far greater debt to victims, the broader church community and God. The hierarchy must listen to victims and provide them with spiritual and pastoral assistance. Church leaders must apologize for the harm done, tell victims what they are doing to punish those who harmed them and

what measures they are taking to prevent future abuse, the report said.

“The church bears a moral and spiritual obligation to heal the deep wounds inflicted from sexual violence perpetrated, enabled, mishandled, or covered up by anyone holding a position of authority in the church,” it said.

The report itself was prepared with victims in a focus group setting who listed priorities for their healing. They identified

the need for accountability for church leaders, information about their cases, true reform of church structures to adequately punish abusers and their enablers.

A LEGAL PROCESS THAT BRINGS BACK THE TRAUMA

Significantly, the 2024 report said the church’s way of handling abuse cases, and its “decades-long pattern of mishandling reports, including abandoning, ignoring, shaming, blaming, and stigmatizing” victims, was itself retraumatizing for them.

It was a reference to the church’s dysfunctional in-house canonical code, where it can take years to process a case and the most severe punishment meted out to a serial rapist priest amounts to being fired.

The process is cloaked in secrecy, such that victims have no rights to information about their case other than learning its outcome.

The report called for sanctions that were “tangible and commensurate with the severity of the crime.” While laicization is a possible outcome for priests who rape children, the church frequently gives out lesser sanctions, such as a period of retreat away from active ministry.

Even when a bishop is removed for bungling cases, the public is only told that he has retired. The report called for the church to “clearly communicate reasons for resignation or removal.”



Jonathan Brady | Associated Press
Director General of MI5 Sir Ken McCallum delivers the annual Director General's Speech at Thames House, the headquarters of the UK's Security Service in London, on Thursday.

MI5 chief says China is a security threat to U.K.

BY JILL LAWLESS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — China poses a daily threat to Britain’s security, the head of the country’s domestic intelligence agency said Thursday, remarks that step up pressure on authorities to explain why the prosecution of two men charged with spying for Beijing collapsed just before they were due to stand trial.

The government, prosecutors and opposition politicians, who were in power until last year, have traded blame over the failed criminal case as the United Kingdom tries to balance between challenging and engaging with the Asian superpower.

“Do Chinese state actors present a U.K. national security threat? The answer is of course yes they do, every day,” MI5 Director-General Ken McCallum told reporters during a rare public appearance. He said his agency had intervened to stop a threat from Beijing as recently as the past week.

McCallum said Beijing-backed meddling has included cyberespionage, stealing technology secrets and “efforts to interfere covertly in U.K. public life.”

Academic Christopher Berry and parliamentary researcher Christopher Cash were charged last year with providing information or documents to China that

could be “prejudicial to the safety or interests” of the U.K.

Then, last month, prosecutors dropped the charges. Director of Public Prosecutions Stephen Parkinson pointed at the government, saying officials refused to testify under oath that China was a threat to national security at the time of the alleged offenses, between 2021 and 2023.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer denies interfering, and late Wednesday the government published witness statements submitted by Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Collins describing China as “the biggest state-based threat to the U.K.’s economic security” and saying Beijing’s espionage activities “harm the interests and security of the U.K.”

McCallum called Britain’s relationship with China a “complex” mix of risk and opportunity, and said MI5 agents “detect and deal, robustly, with activity threatening U.K. national security.”

“Of course I am frustrated when opportunities to prosecute national security-threatening activity are not followed through for whatever reason,” he said, but added that prosecution decisions were out of MI5’s hands.

Trump warns Hamas of consequences if internal bloodshed persists in Gaza

BY AAMER MADHANI
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday warned Hamas “we will have no choice but to go in and kill them” if internal bloodshed persists in Gaza.

The grim warning from Trump came after he previously downplayed the internal violence in the territory since a ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect last week in the two-year war.

Trump later clarified he won’t send U.S. troops into Gaza after launching the threat against Hamas.

“It’s not going to be us,” Trump said in an exchange with reporters. “We won’t have to. There are people very close, very nearby that will go in and they’ll do the trick very easily, but under our auspices.”

The president did not specify if he was speaking of Israel, but action by Israeli forces could risk violating terms of the ceasefire agreement.

The president’s shift in tone with Hamas was notable.

Trump said Tuesday that Hamas had taken out “a couple of gangs that were very bad” and had killed a number of gang members. “That

didn’t bother me much, to be honest with you,” he said.

The Republican president did not say how he would follow through on his threat posted on his Truth Social platform, and the White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment seeking clarity.

But Trump also made clear he had limited patience for the killings that Hamas was carrying out against rival factions inside the devastated territory. “They will disarm, and if they don’t do so, we will disarm them, and it’ll happen quickly and perhaps violently,” Trump said.

The Hamas-run police maintained a high degree of public security after the militants seized power in Gaza 18 years ago, while also cracking down on dissent. They largely melted away in recent months as Israeli forces seized large areas of Gaza and targeted Hamas security forces with airstrikes.

Powerful local families and armed gangs, including some anti-Hamas factions backed by Israel, stepped into the void. Many are accused of hijacking humanitarian aid and selling it for profit, contributing to Gaza’s starvation crisis.

The ceasefire plan introduced by Trump had called for all hostages — living and dead — to be handed over by a deadline that expired Monday. But under the deal, if that didn’t happen, Hamas was to share information about deceased hostages and try to hand them over as soon as possible.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel “will not compromise” and demanded that Hamas fulfill the requirements laid out in the ceasefire deal about the return of hostages’ bodies.

Hamas’ armed wing said in a statement Wednesday that the group honored the ceasefire’s terms and handed over the remains of the hostages it had access to.

The United States announced last week that it is sending about 200 troops to Israel to

help support and monitor the ceasefire deal in Gaza as part of a team that includes partner nations and nongovernmental organizations. But U.S. officials have stressed that U.S. forces would not set foot in Gaza.

Israeli officials have also been angered by the pace of the return of the remains of dead hostages the militant group had been holding in captivity. Hamas had agreed to return 28 bodies as part of the ceasefire deal in addition to 20 living hostages, who were released earlier this week.

Hamas has assured the U.S. through intermediaries that it is working to return dead hostages, according to two senior U.S. advisers. The advisers, who were not authorized to comment publicly and briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, said they do not believe Hamas has violated the deal.

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