

## Belgian Catholics' abuse plan falls flat with critics

Francis X. Rocca Religion News Service | Sep. 13, 2010

After publishing a report on sex abuse of children by Roman Catholic priests, Belgian church leaders announced on Monday (Sept.13) they would establish a center of "recognition, reconciliation and healing" to punish abusers and protect victims.

But victims' advocates complained the measure would be meaningless since the church will not report cases to civil authorities unless the victims request it.

"We are fully committed to tackling this problem in a new way," Archbishop Andre-Joseph Leonard of Brussels told reporters. "It causes us pain. Coming out of such a crisis is not easy."

A report by a church-sponsored panel, released on Friday (Sept. 10), detailed 475 cases of sex abuse by clergy, which it said may have led to at least 13 suicides.

The document was among the material seized on June 24 by Belgian police, who also seized documents, computers and cell phones from Archbishop Leonard's home outside Brussels. On the same date, bishops attending a conference were detained for nine hours, and the tomb of a deceased archbishop was opened and searched.

Last Thursday (Sept. 9), a Belgian court ruled those raids were illegal, rendering the seized documents inadmissible in judicial proceedings.

Abuse complaints in Belgium surged following the April resignation of Bishop Roger Vangheluwe of Bruges, who confessed to having sexually abused a boy who later turned out to be his nephew.

On Monday, demonstrators protested outside the news conference announcing the reconciliation center.

"I think it will be old wine in new bags. The bishops have found for many, many years several techniques to gain time and to postpone their final judgment," one victim, Sam Deurinck, told the Reuters news agency.

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