

Caritas head denied second term by Vatican

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VATICAN CITY -- Vatican officials have prevented the secretary-general of Caritas Internationalis from seeking a second four-year term.

Lesley-Anne Knight, a British citizen born in Zimbabwe, did not receive the necessary approval, or "nihil obstat" ("nothing stands in the way"), in January when she submitted her name as a candidate to continue in the position with the church's worldwide aid and development organization.

"The Holy See wants a change in the way it works with Caritas and says this requires a change in the person of the secretary-general," said a statement released late Feb. 18 by Caritas Internationalis in Rome.

"The Holy See has therefore not granted Mrs. Knight the nihil obstat to seek another mandate," the statement said.

The statement said the Vatican had acknowledged "the professional work done and achievements of Mrs. Knight."

Elections for the position of secretary-general and international president, which is held by Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, are set for late May in Rome during Caritas Internationalis' quadrennial general assembly.

Submitting the names of candidates for the two positions is normally considered routine within the Vatican. However, the Vatican acted to block Knight's candidacy.

In an attempt to keep Knight's candidacy alive, the Caritas Internationalis bureau -- Cardinal Rodriguez, Knight, the organization's treasurer and seven regional presidents -- met Feb. 5 and asked Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican secretary of state, to discuss the issue, according to the statement.

Although representatives of Cardinal Bertone met several times with Cardinal Rodriguez, bureau representatives or members of the Caritas Internationalis Candidates Committee, the initial decision remained unchanged, the statement said.

"The bureau deeply regrets the decision of the Holy See," the Caritas statement added. "The bureau thanks Mrs. Knight for the professional work, her accomplishments and commitment to Caritas Internationalis. The bureau is very grateful she will continue until the general assembly."

The Candidates Committee will begin seeking candidates for the secretary-general position, the statement added.

The Tablet, a British magazine covering the Catholic Church, reported Feb. 18 that an unidentified official with a Caritas member agency suggested Knight may have been rejected because she had made comments that were "critical of the Vatican machine, has made no secret of it and has failed to be discreet."

The magazine quoted a second unidentified Caritas source as saying that Vatican officials were concerned that Knight had not done enough to instill a Catholic identity or to develop a sense of evangelization within Caritas programs.

Tensions between Caritas and the Vatican have surfaced at times over the years. *The Tablet* cited difficulties with the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the church's charity-promotion agency. German Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, past president of the council, designated Caritas member Catholic Relief Services to coordinate the church's relief efforts in Haiti after the devastating January 2010 earthquake.

The Tablet reported that Cardinal Cordes never consulted with Knight or her office before announcing the decision two weeks after the disaster and said Knight made no secret of her displeasure with the choice.

A CRS spokesman referred all questions to Caritas Internationalis.

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