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Dublin's high court to hear its first African sexual abuse case

John Cooney | Jan. 31, 2013

A court in Ireland is set to hear the case of an African who says an Irish missionary priest sexually abused him when he was a boy attending a Spiritan-run college in Sierra Leone, according to court documents filed late Wednesday in the High Court in Dublin.

This will be the first time an African will have abuse allegations against Irish missionary priests heard in Ireland.

Elvis Kuteh says a priest who is living in Ireland sexually abused him when he was a student at Christ the King College, an elite school in Sierra Leone run by the Spiritans, formerly the Holy Ghost Fathers. The accused priest?s name has not been made public. Kuteh has brought the lawsuit against Fr. Marc Whelan, the current provincial of the Spiritans in Ireland.

Kuteh, who now lives in England, was unable to put the Spiritans on trial in his native Sierra Leone, according to a source familiar with the case. The case is to be heard later this year in the High Court in Dublin.

Kuteh was not available for comment.

The Spiritans have been informed of the suit and are studying their defense, said Mark Vincent Healy, an Irish abuse campaigner.

Sources familiar with the case told *NCR* that this case will be a major human rights test of an African's right to bring a complaint before a court in any European jurisdiction.

Healy, who supports Kuteh in the lawsuit, said the development is "very significant" in that it could open up justice opportunities for Africans abused by Irish missionaries in any part of Africa.

"I have asked that [Kuteh] is given as much support as possible by his fellow alumni from Africa," Healy said. "I have also asked that his foreign affairs and justice departments extend whatever support and assistance that can be offered without prejudice to him."

"It may be difficult for this survivor, but he's happy to proceed," he said. "I am sure he can count on the support of his past pupils, fellow alumni and government. He certainly has mine."

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