

Access to clergy sex abuse site limited at Vatican

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One of the domain names of a website that is the primary source of information on clergy sex abuse cases has been blocked on the Vatican's web servers.

Users on Vatican servers who try to access one of the four web addresses for **Bishopaccountability.org**, which tracks publicly available information on clergy accused of abuse, are told the page has been blocked because of "Hate/Racism."

A Vatican spokesman said the site may be blocked because of an automatic filter system that checks words that appear on websites for explicit nature or inappropriateness.

Some court documents that appear on the site might contain such language, said Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica. "It would make sense they would block the words, not knowing it's a clergy abuse website."

When accessing one of the four web addresses for Bishopaccountability.org [1], users are told "this page has been blocked by the Vatican protection system" in Italian capital letters in a notice at the top of a page with a background image of St. Peter's Basilica.

"If you believe that the report is incorrect," the notice states, you can provide feedback by entering your name, email, affiliation and rationale.

"Thanks for your help," it reads.

The access error comes when users attempt to access the site from **www.bishopaccountability.org**. Three other variations of the site's name -- **bishopaccountability.org**, **bishop-accountability.org**, and **www.bishop-accountability.org** -- are accessible.

When users access the **www.bishopaccountability.org** address, the form inviting feedback on the blocking records the user's IP address, a numerical label identifying the computer used, and labels the category of the request "Hate/Racism."

Rosica, who has been providing English language translation for the Vatican during its daily press briefings, said he had previously had trouble accessing other websites, including for the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*.

After submitting the form and explaining the situation, Rosica said, the website became available "very quickly."

Bishopaccountability.org, which is a non-profit corporation in the U.S. state of Massachusetts, is run by a staff of two located in the Boston area.

A staple of those researching the decades-long clergy sex abuse crisis, the site includes links to reporting on abuse since the 1980s, a database of accused abusers throughout the U.S., testimonies of abuse survivors, and court documents from lawsuits and criminal prosecutions across the U.S.

Among its activities in the past year, the site has:

*Made available more than 8,500 pages of material detailing claims of sexual abuse by a group of Franciscan priests and brothers in California, after their court-ordered release in May 2012;

*Provided a detailed timeline of the witness testimonies and evidence in the trial of Msgr. William Lynn, a former official in the Philadelphia archdiocese who was found guilty in June 2012 of endangering children during his time at the archdiocese from 1992-2004, and;

*Given background information on the release of some 12,000 files documenting Cardinal Roger Mahony and the Los Angeles archdiocese's handling of abuse cases in the 1980s, following the files' court ordered release in February 2013;

"This Web site is dedicated to the survivors and their families and loved ones," the site states on its "About us" page.

Access to one of the site's four addresses was prevented by the web service provided in Paul VI Audience Hall, a facility the Vatican has provided for use by reporters during the papal transition.

NCR has filed a request for the address to be unblocked.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.bishop-accountability.org>

[2] <http://twitter.com/joshjmac>