

Court declines request to investigate Vatican leaders over abuse issues

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The International Criminal Court declined a request from victims of clergy sexual abuse to investigate Vatican officials and their responsibility for the abuse of children by Catholic priests around the world.

In a two-page letter May 31, the court told the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which represented the victims, that the offenses alleged in the survivor's petition "do not appear to fall within the jurisdiction of the court."

The request from victims of clergy of sexual abuse was filed in September 2011 and targeted Pope Benedict XVI and other top Vatican officials, saying that they "tolerate and enable the systematic widespread concealing of rape and child sex crimes throughout the world."

Advocates for abuse victims pledged to continue gathering evidence in anticipation of filing another request with the court based at The Hague.

Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, told reporters that the outcome was expected.

"I never doubted this would be the response (of the ICC), given the total groundlessness of the accusation," Lombardi was reported as saying.

"We're neither deterred nor discouraged by this news," Barbara Blaine, president of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which sought the investigation, said in a June 13 statement. "We are confident that the ICC will see sufficient evidence that high ranking Catholic officials are still knowingly enabling predators to harm and endanger children across the world, while concealing these heinous crimes even more effectively."

Pamela Spees, lead attorney in the case for the Center for Constitutional Rights, did not return calls seeking comment.

Abuse victims asked the court to consider filing charges of "crimes against humanity" against Pope Benedict XVI, both as pope and as the previous prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Others named in the filing were Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals and former Vatican secretary of state; Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of state and former secretary of the doctrinal congregation; and Cardinal William Levada, who was prefect of the congregation at the time.

Blaine, in her statement, said the organization will continue to work to hold the church responsible for how it handled reports of abuse. "As Martin Luther King said, 'The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice,'" she said.

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