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Vatican to collaborate with authorities over nuncio's alleged abuse

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 16, 2013

The Vatican intends to collaborate with authorities in the Dominican Republic in any investigation into alleged sexual abuse by its recalled ambassador to the country, the Vatican's spokesperson said.

Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski served as the Holy See's apostolic nuncio to the Dominican Republic from 2008 until Aug. 21, when he was removed from the post and recalled to the Vatican.

Wesolowski's being recalled and relieved of his duties does not preclude the prelate from "taking responsibility for what is eventually determined to have happened," Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi told *NCR* in a statement Friday.

Initially, no reason was given for Wesolowski's recall, but a television news program aired in the Dominican Republic days later alleged he had paid for sex with minors. A Dominican bishop later confirmed the nuncio's removal was related to an investigation into the sexual abuse of minors by clergy in the island nation.

On Sept. 4, the nation's attorney general said he would investigate claims of sexual abuse against the nuncio; however, it is unclear if he has legal jurisdiction over the case, since it involves a diplomatic representative.

In July, shortly before Pope Francis left Rome for the 2013 World Youth Day in Brazil, Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, archbishop of the Dominican capital of Santo Domingo, informed the pope of "serious accusations" against Wesolowski, Lombardi, director of the Holy See's Press Office, said in an email to *NCR* Friday.

"As a consequence, the Secretariat of State quickly intervened, at the beginning of August, shortly after the [pope's] return from Brazil, recalling the Nuncio and relieving him of his duties, and launching an investigation that was entrusted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," Lombardi said in his statement.

"In early September, the Secretariat of State declared, through the Dominican Ambassador to the Holy See, its intention to collaborate with the Dominican authorities with anything they required," Lombardi continued.

"The recalling of the Nuncio absolutely does not manifest an intent to prevent [the Nuncio] from taking responsibility for what is eventually determined to have happened."

Catholic News Service reported that López had praised Wesolowski as recently as Aug. 27, calling him a "great friend and promoter of peace."

López released a statement Sept. 5 in which he asked for forgiveness from the victims and their families.

"With humility, we recognize that we, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, are in the midst of a situation that concerns and embarrasses us," he said.

López called for the Dominican justice system to act "firmly and clearly. ... Anyone who has done wrong has to

face the consequences of their actions."

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