



The president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, Luis Arguello, center and Jesus Diaz Sariego, President of Spain's Conference of Religious Orders, left, take part in a press conference in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, July 9, 2024. Spain's Catholic bishops have approved a plan to compensate the victims of sexual abuse inside the Church whose alleged aggressors have died or whose possible crimes have prescribed. Spain's government and victims' associations consider the initiative lacking in real guarantees. (AP/Paul White)

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Spain's Catholic bishops approved Tuesday a plan to compensate the victims of sexual abuse inside the Church whose alleged aggressors have died or whose possible crimes have been proscribed, an initiative the government and victims' associations called lacking in real guarantees.

The Spanish Episcopal Conference did not provide an estimate on how many victims it could help. But last year the conference said it had found evidence of 728 sexual abusers within the church since 1945 as part of its first public report after years of rejecting a comprehensive approach to investigating sexual abuse.

Seventy-five percent of the cases had occurred before 1990 and more than 60% of the offenders were dead, the conference said.

Last year a survey by Spain's public [Ombudsman office indicated](#) that the total number of victims, including minors, could be much, much higher.

The president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, Luis Argüello, said Tuesday in a press conference in Madrid that "our work doesn't begin or end today, but today is important.

"Since most of the cases are from before the 1990s, many cannot be pursued because of the statutes of limitations that limit ordinary law."

The move by the clergy leadership comes after [Spain's government approved a plan](#) last year to force the church to pay economic compensation to the victims of abuse.

The church's plan includes a plank for the "material reparation" of the victims, which can include financial compensation and payment of medical or therapeutic services. The church pledged to carry out the "economic, spiritual and psychological" reparation of the victims.

It also includes the commitment of the Church to determine the truth of an alleged case of sexual abuse even when the supposed perpetrator has died.

“There is always a judicial reparation, but for those cases that have proscribed for ordinary and canonical law, and it is not possible to reopen them due to the statute of limitations, or because the aggressor has died, we believe that the Church has the moral duty to these people,” said Jesús Díaz Sariego, president of Spain’s Conference of Religious Orders, which along with the bishops is backing the plan.

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Each case will be handled by a newly created board of experts which will advise each diocese on how to best attend to each victim.

The advisory board will consist of 10 people, four medical experts, four criminal law experts, and a representative of the bishops conference and Spain’s Conference of Religious Orders. The new board could then call on a representative of victims’ associations to work with it, the bishops’ conference said.

For those abuse cases that can be pursued legally, the church said it also has offices to attend to the victims.

While Argüello said that the church had listened to the recommendations of both the Ombudsman and victims’ associations, the Spanish government and some victims’ associations said that the plan fell short.

“We don’t buy the plan of the Church,” Juan Cuatrecasas, spokesman for the victims’ association Robbed Childhood, told Spanish National Radio. Cuatrecasas said that the plan lacked any government oversight.

A day before the church presented its plan, Spain’s government issued a statement saying that it rejected what it called a unilateral and ineffective effort at reparation.

The statement said that it would not accept the church’s plan because “its resolutions are not mandatory, so in no way does it guarantee reparation.”

Arguello said that all 67 bishops who attended the extraordinary meeting in Madrid backed the plan, with only one abstention in one of the three documents that were approved.

Only a [handful of countries have had government-initiated or parliamentary inquiries](#) into clergy sex abuse, although some independent groups have carried out their own investigations.