News



by Joshua J. McElwee

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The leading Catholic clergy sexual abuse tracking website has identified nearly 80 priests in Chile that have been publicly accused of sexually abusing minors, releasing their names online just days before Pope Francis is to visit the country.

BishopAccountability.org calls the list only a sampling of the number of Chilean priests who have likely committed abuse, saying that unlike in the U.S., the church in Chile has yet to face substantial outside investigation into its handling of sexual misconduct.

"This list — is a fraction of the total number of accused clerics who would be known if Chile's church leaders were required to report to law enforcement, if its legal system allowed victims more time to bring criminal and civil charges, or if dioceses and religious orders were investigated by prosecutors or state commissions," the group notes in a statement accompanying the database.

Francis is to visit Chile Jan. 15-18 as part of a two-country tour that includes a visit to neighboring Peru Jan. 18-22.

Local observers say attention during the Chilean visit may center on how the pope can help the country's church regain trustworthiness after a recent spate of cases of clergy sexual abuse.

But the pope himself has also been criticized for his record on the abuse issue, especially his 2015 appointment of Bishop Juan Barros Madrid of Osorno, Chile. Barros has been accused of protecting notorious abuser Fr. Fernando Karadima in the 1980s and '90s.

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While Catholics make up nearly 60 percent of Chile's population of 17.9 million, recent surveys have suggested widespread indifference in the country to the pope's upcoming visit.

A Jan. 8 article in La Tercera, the country's second-largest newspaper, said that only 23 percent of Chileans consider the pope's visit to be important, and 50 percent consider it to have no or little importance.

Release of the BishopAccountability.org database came shortly after the Vatican announced Jan. 10 that it would be taking control of a Catholic religious association in Peru that has been accused of facilitating the spiritual, psychological and physical abuse of children.

The Vatican press office said in a statement that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life would now be directly overseeing the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae and has named Jericó, Colombia, Bishop Noel Londoño as the group's apostolic commissioner.

The statement said Newark, New Jersey, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, who had been investigating the group in Peru as a Vatican delegate, would continue his work.

Sodalitium was founded in 1971 by lay Catholic Luis Figari, who has been accused of sexual abuse and was ordered by the Vatican last year to discontinue all association with the group.

[Joshua J. McElwee is NCR Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]

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