News
Vatican



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May 10, 2018
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Under increasing scrutiny about the handling of clergy sexual abuse cases over decades, Chile's Catholic bishops say that Pope Francis' recent emotional meetings at the Vatican with three abuse victims "shows us the path that the Chilean Church is called to follow."

In a May 10 statement from the standing committee of their bishops' conference, the Chilean prelates also confirm they will be meeting with Francis over four days May 14-17. The pope called the bishops to Rome en masse last month.

The committee says it "wanted to declare by means of a statement the disposition with which [the bishops] answer the call of Peter."

"We reiterate our union with Pope Francis in the pain and shame expressed about the crimes committed against minors and adults in church settings," the bishops say.

"We value the recent meetings of the Holy Father with three of the victims of Fernando Karadima," the prelates continue. "The attitude of Pope Francis to welcome them sets an example ... to follow in the face of accusations of abuse of conscience, sexual abuse and, ultimately, against any abuse of power that may

occur within our communities."

Karadima, a Chilean priest who was a serial child abuser, was sentenced by the Vatican to a life of prayer and penance in 2011.

Francis met with three of Karadima's most prominent victims at the end of April. It was part of a stunning turnabout for the pope after he was criticized during a January visit to Chile for his appointment of controversial Bishop Juan Barros Madrid, who as a priest, survivors say witnessed some of Karadima's crimes.

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While in the country, Francis twice called the accusations against Barros "calumny." Then, in an April 11 letter to Chile's bishops calling them to Rome, the pope said he had made "serious mistakes" in his handling of abuse cases in the country "due to a lack of truthful and balanced information."

The three Chilean survivors, who each met with Francis individually and then again together April 30, said in a statement that he had been "attentive, receptive and very empathetic."



Chilean clerical sex abuse survivors James Hamilton, left, and Juan Carlos Cruz are seen on a terrace over St. Peter's Square April 29. (CNS/Claudio Peri, EPA)

One of the survivors said at a May 2 press conference he "never, never saw someone be so contrite." Juan Carlos Cruz, now a communications professional in the United States, recounted Francis telling him: "I was part of the problem. I caused this and I apologize to you."

It is unknown how Francis' meetings with the Chilean bishops will develop, and even how many of the country's prelates are coming.

Luis Badilla, a noted Vatican watcher who runs the respected *Il Sismografo* blog in Italy, reported May 9 that 31 of the country's 32 active bishops are coming for the meetings. Badilla added that three or four of Chile's 19 living retired bishops are also expected to make the journey.

One of the bishops reported as not coming is Cardinal Francisco Errázuriz, the retired archbishop of the Chilean capital of Santiago and a member of Francis' advisory Council of Cardinals.

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Many victims blame Errázuriz, who led the Santiago archdiocese from 1998 to 2010, for not reporting Karadima to the Vatican or to local authorities earlier. During the May 2 press conference, survivor James Hamilton called Errázuriz "a man who was covering up the vile acts of Karadima and his circle."

Errázuriz has said that he erred in not acting against Karadima. After several of Karadima's victims went public in 2010, he said it was a mistake to not see accusations he had received years earlier against the priest as credible.

While the Chilean survivors praised Francis for meeting them, they also said they are waiting to see changes from him following their encounters.

"We're waiting for actions," said survivor José Andrés Murillo. "We always say that we are not here to do public relations, but for actions."

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