News



Auxiliary Bishop Fernando Ramos Perez of Santiago, Chile, and Bishop Juan Ignacio Gonzalez Errazuriz of San Bernardo, Chile, lead a press conference at the Vatican May 14. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Junno Arocho Esteves

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — May 14, 2018

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A Chilean bishop acknowledged the damage inflicted on survivors of clerical sex abuse and the mishandling of cases by church leaders in the country.

"I am not saying that perhaps we have made mistakes. We have made mistakes," said Bishop Juan Ignacio Gonzalez Errazuriz of San Bernardo.

Gonzalez, along with Auxiliary Bishop Fernando Ramos Perez of Santiago, met with journalists May 14 on the eve of a three-day meeting between Pope Francis and 34 Chilean bishops.

The bishops are meeting at the Vatican May 15-17 to discuss with Francis their handling of clerical sex abuse allegations.

Echoing Francis' April 11 letter to the Chilean bishops, Ramos told journalists that the bishops felt "pain and shame" for the abuses committed.

"Receiving information that sexual abuses occurred in our community left many people in shock, because it is something that is unacceptable, intolerable, unjustifiable from every point of view," Ramos said.

When asked whether they intend to follow the pope's lead and ask forgiveness of survivors, Ramos said attending to the wounds inflicted upon "victims is a great, moral imperative."

"As Jesus said, we must ask forgiveness seven times 70. We are completely willing to ask forgiveness, but we also hope that forgiveness (can) be restorative," he said.

Recently, three Chilean abuse survivors who met with Francis strongly criticized the bishops, accusing them of misinforming the pope on the reality of sexual abuse in the country.

Francis invited Juan Carlos Cruz, Jose Andres Murillo and James Hamilton to stay at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, the Vatican residence where he lives, and to meet with him individually April 27-29. They met him again as a group April 30.

Briefing journalists May 2 on their meeting with the pope, the survivors read a joint statement saying that for "10 years we have been treated as enemies, because we fight against sexual abuse and cover-up in the church."

Cruz said he told the pope how he was demonized by Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz Ossa, retired archbishop of Santiago, and his successor, Cardinal Riccardo Ezzati, in a leaked email between the two prelates. Although media reports initially reported Errazuriz would not attend the meeting, he boarded a plane May 13 from Santiago and landed in Rome.

Cruz said he told Francis "how these two men lacked respect toward a person, which was known because they did the same to Jimmy (Hamilton) and Jose (Murillo). They called me a 'serpent,' they called me everything. I told the Holy Father, and he said he was hurt," Cruz said.

When asked whether they also received an apology from the bishops of Chile, Cruz said: "Pope Francis asked forgiveness for himself and on behalf of the universal church. The bishops of Chile don't know how to ask for forgiveness."

Gonzalez told journalists that victims must remain at the center of the upcoming discussions. He also said that he met with countless victims in his diocese and "knew the survivors that met with the Holy Father."

Shortly after the press conference, Cruz tweeted: "I've never seen him before in my life. The truth according to the bishops of Chile is very different from what we all have lived."

Advertisement

"My conclusion regarding the press conference of the Chilean bishops — (Bishops) Ramos and Gonzalez — is that they are great actors, who see a reality and a truth totally different from what common people see, and they should return to the planet from where they came," Cruz said in a follow-up tweet.

Several Chilean bishops arrived earlier in the day at Rome's Fiumicino airport for the upcoming meeting with Francis.

Upon his arrival, Bishop Christian Caro Cordero of Puerto Montt told journalists: "I wouldn't say that there is a church in crisis. I would say that there is a serious problem that must be confronted, but not a church in crisis."

However, in a statement May 12, the Vatican press office said Francis was concerned by the "circumstances and extraordinary challenges posed by abuses of power — sexual and of conscience — that have occurred in the last decades."

The pope "considers it necessary to profoundly examine the causes and consequences, as well as the mechanisms that in some cases led to a cover-up and serious omissions regarding the victims," the Vatican said.