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The Mexican bishops' conference has confirmed 152 priests have been removed from ministry for sexually abusing minors.

In a Feb. 12 statement, the conference published the preliminary figure, while promising, "We will continue with the effort to have a complete diagnosis of cases of child sexual abuse in Mexico."

The statement followed comments from Archbishop Rogelio Cabrera Lopez of Monterrey, conference president, who told reporters Feb. 10, "152 priests have been removed from ministry. Some, for the size of their crime, have had to go to prison."

The bishops' conference promised "zero tolerance" on the issue of child sexual abuse by clergy and said it released the figures in the interest of transparency.

Past cases of sexual abuse committed by clergy have scandalized Mexico, but also brought accusations of covering up crimes and an unwillingness to acknowledge to the problem.

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In its statement, the bishops' conference said it had created a "national protection of minors team," which started work Jan. 7. Among the team's first challenges "was an absence of national statistics on cases of child sexual abuse on the part of clergy," although figures are now currently being collected from Catholic organizations.

Protocols for identifying and responding to cases of clerical sexual abuse have also been developed, and training on the diocesan level is ongoing, the statement said.

"The church is, today more than ever, cooperating with the country's authorities, especially in cases of abuse against minors on the part of clergy, according to Mexican law," the bishops' statement said.

"Society and members of the church demand it and we cannot permit one case more."