News



In this Jan. 4, 2018 file photo, French President Emmanuel Macron, left, greets Apostolic Nuncio to France Luigi Ventura, at the Elysee Palace in Paris. Multiple men have accused Archbishop Luigi Ventura of groping and inappropriate touching, and the Vatican’s former ambassador to France goes on trial Tuesday Nov. 10, 2020, for alleged sexual misconduct. (AP File/Pool via AP/Yoan Valat)

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Paris — November 10, 2020
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A sexual assault trial for the Vatican's former ambassador to France went ahead without him Nov. 10 after he produced a doctor's note saying it was too dangerous for him to travel from Rome to Paris in the midst of France's resurgent coronavirus epidemic.

The court rejected a request from his accusers' lawyers that the trial of Archbishop Luigi Ventura be pushed back because he wasn't present.

Represented by his defense team, Ventura was tried in his absence on five counts of alleged sexual assault. Three of his alleged victims who filed police complaints of groping and inappropriate touching on their buttocks were in court.

Exceptionally, the Vatican in 2019 lifted the ambassador's diplomatic immunity, allowing for his trial and for the allegations to be properly investigated.

Ventura has repeatedly denied wrongdoing. Sexual assault is punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

His defense lawyer, Solange Doumic, told the court that Ventura's doctor deemed it "completely unreasonable" for him to travel at age 75 during the resurgent pandemic, as Paris hospitals are again struggling to keep up with coronavirus cases.

The lawyer argued that the trial should proceed without Ventura and suggested that the plaintiffs' request for a delay was to milk more publicity for the case.

After deliberating, the court ruled that the trial should proceed.

Among his accusers is Mathieu De La Souchere. He filed a police report in Paris in 2019 accusing Ventura of touching his buttocks repeatedly during a reception at Paris City Hall.

The judge said that, during prior questioning, Ventura had explained his behaviour by saying he had a "Latin" temperament and that there was nothing sexual about

his gestures.

"Mr. Ventura is lying," De La Souchere told the court.

"There is talk of a hand on a buttock," he said. "It was more than that."

Another of the men who filed a complaint also testified that Ventura grabbed his buttocks during a reception at City Hall.

The Vatican recalled Ventura in 2019 and he later retired. The Vatican has previously recalled its diplomats when they get into trouble during overseas postings.

In the most high-profile case, the Vatican recalled its ambassador to the Dominican Republic and prepared to put him on trial in the city state's criminal tribunal for allegedly sexually abusing young boys. But he died before the trial started.

Ventura's trial comes the same day that the Vatican released a much-awaited report into Theodore McCarrick, a once-influential American cardinal who was defrocked by Pope Francis in 2019 after a Vatican investigation confirmed decades of rumors that he was a sexual predator.

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