Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Francis arrives for an audience with members of Roman Universities and Pontifical Institutions, in the Pope Paul VI hall at the Vatican, Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023. Pope Francis said financial misconduct by Vatican personnel harms the church’s mission and scandalizes the faithful, as he doubled down Feb. 25 on the need for trials in the tiny city state to find justice. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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Pope Francis said Feb. 25 that financial misconduct by Vatican personnel harms the church's mission and scandalizes the faithful, doubling down on the need for trials in the tiny city state to find justice.

Francis made the comments during an address to prosecutors, judges and employees of the Vatican City State's civil and criminal tribunal at the start of the judicial year. The tribunal has seen its caseload grow significantly in recent years as the Vatican enforces new financial standards and accountability, most recently with an ongoing trial into the Holy See's investment in a London property.

Defense lawyers for some of the 10 defendants have flagged shortcomings in the Vatican's unique legal system over the course of the trial, arguing that the rights of the defense haven't been respected. Francis didn't refer to the London case specifically, but he warned against focusing on the nitty-gritty of the Vatican's legal system given the "seriousness of the conduct at issue."

"Here we must be clear and avoid the risk of 'confusing the finger with the moon,'" Francis said, using an analogy to insist that the focus must remain on the big picture of the alleged crimes.

"The problem is not the trials, but the facts and conduct that determine them and make them painfully necessary. In fact, such behavior, on the part of members of the Church, seriously harms its effectiveness in reflecting the divine light."

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The London trial, which opened in July 2021 and is expected to conclude before the end of the year, concerns the Vatican's 350 million-euro investment in a luxury property as well as spinoff investigations. Prosecutors have accused 10 people of fleecing the Holy See of tens of millions of euros; the defense has denied

wrongdoing.

The Vatican’s chief prosecutor, Alessandro Diddi, acknowledged intensified public interest and scrutiny of the tribunal, but insisted his office would not be swayed by public opinion or media pressure. He pointed to the growing number of instances of judicial cooperation with other countries’ legal systems as evidence of respect for the Vatican legal system.

"The growing attention that public opinion reserves for our activities and the judgment that many, every day, express on our work, make us aware of the great responsibility entrusted to us and the need to fulfil our duties scrupulously and accurately, but, above all, with great respect for the values underlying the guarantees of due process," he said.

Francis’ own role in the London transactions has come up in the trial, as has his modification of the legal code during the course of the investigation. In recent hearings, Judge Giuseppe Pignatone has tended to cut off lawyers or witnesses who refer to the pope.