Vatican
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The headquarters of the Institute for the Works of Religion, commonly known as the Vatican bank, with the Apostolic Palace in background (NCR/Joshua J. McElwee)



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Vatican City — July 2, 2024

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The Vatican's first-ever auditor general said false information given to the pope is what led to his wrongful termination, a claim he said will be central to his appeal scheduled to be heard before a Vatican court July 3.

Libero Milone, a former chairman of Deloitte Italy who had also worked for the United Nations and Fiat, was named auditor general of the Vatican in 2015 and was expected to serve a five-year term. But he resigned in June 2017 and, several months later, told the media he was forced to step down after discovering irregularities in the Vatican's books.

Cardinal Angelo Becciu, then-substitute or second-in-command at the Vatican Secretariat of State, told Reuters in September 2017 that "Milone went against all rules and was spying on the private lives of his superiors and staff, myself included. If he hadn't resigned, we would have pursued him from a penal standpoint."

In January, a Vatican tribunal ruled against Milone and his deputy, Ferruccio Panicco, who sued the Vatican for 9.29 million euros ($10.1 million) in damages for the termination of their contracts and its detrimental impact on their reputations. Panicco died in June 2023 due to complications from a tumor.

Milone told reporters June 19 that an "old guard" in the Vatican had fabricated evidence against him and levied false accusations in order to get rid of him.

In the press briefing, Milone claimed that Cardinal Becciu and Domenico Giani, the former head of the Vatican gendarmes, were among those that "deceived the pope,"

America magazine reported July 1.

In December, the Vatican City State criminal court sentenced Becciu to five years and six months in prison on two counts of embezzlement and one of aggravated fraud.

"They deceived the pope, produced false information according to which I had spied on cardinals and committed other crimes of which there was no documentation or proof and they ruined my career and good name forever," Milone told journalists, Argentine newspaper La Nación reported.

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"The Holy Father was never told the true story; I believe he acted in good faith when he saw a fabricated document incriminating me," Milone said. "But I never spied on anyone, rather they confused what is an audit with espionage."

Testifying at his own trial in 2022, Becciu said that Milone's ouster was ordered by the pope.

"I had no responsibility in Milone's resignation," he told the court. "The order was issued by the pope without my participation. He asked me to summon Milone and inform him that he no longer enjoyed his trust."

In an interview with Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera published June 30, Becciu defended his innocence against the charges against him, saying "not one cent ever went into my pockets" from the Vatican Secretariat of State. The cardinal's lawyer told reporters at the time that his client would appeal his case, and none of the six people given jail terms were taken into custody upon sentencing pending appeal.

American magazine reported that in the June 19 press briefing, Milone said it was after looking into the purchase of a London property with Vatican funds, among other irregularities, that his activity became a concern to then-archbishop Becciu and Giani

The report added that Milone and his lawyers will take their case to the International Court of Justice in the Hague if their case is not resolved in the Vatican court.