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Pope Leo XIV has said there should be no tolerance in the Catholic Church for any type of abuse — sexual, spiritual or abuse of authority — and called for "transparent processes" to create a culture of prevention across the church.

Leo made his first public comments about the clergy sex abuse scandal in a written message to a Peruvian journalist who documented a particularly egregious case of abuse and financial corruption in a Peruvian-based Catholic movement, the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae.

The message was read out loud on Friday (June 20) night in Lima during a performance of a play based on the Sodalitium scandal and the work of the journalist Paola Ugaz.

"It is urgent to root in the whole church a culture of prevention that does not tolerate any form of abuse — neither of power or authority, nor abuse of conscience, spiritual or sexual abuse," Leo said in the message. "This culture will only be authentic if it is born of active vigilance, of transparent processes and sincere listening to those who have been hurt. For this, we need journalists."

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Leo is well aware of the Sodalitium scandal, since he spent two decades as a missionary priest and bishop in Peru, where the group was founded in 1971. The then-Bishop Robert Prevost was responsible for listening to the Sodalitium's victims as the Peruvian bishops' point-person for abuse victims and helped some reach financial settlements with the organization.

After Pope Francis brought him to the Vatican in 2023, Prevost helped dismantle the group entirely by overseeing the resignation of a powerful Sodalitium bishop. The Sodalitium was officially suppressed earlier this year, right before Francis died.

Now as pope, Leo has to oversee the dismantling of the Soldalitium and its sizable assets. The Vatican envoy on the ground handling the job, Msgr. Jordi Bertomeu, read Leo's message on Friday night, appearing alongside Ugaz on stage.

In the message, Leo also praised journalists for their courage in holding the powerful to account, demanded public authorities protect them and said a free press is a "common good that cannot be renounced."

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Ugaz and a Sodalitium victim, Pedro Salinas, have faced years of criminal and civil litigation from Sodalitium and its supporters for their investigative reporting into the group's twisted practices and financial misconduct, and they have praised Leo for his handling of the case.

The abuse scandal is one of the thorniest issues facing Leo, especially given demands from survivors that he go even farther than Francis in applying a zero-tolerance policy for abuse across the church, including for abusers whose victims were adults.