News



At a July 31 SNAP press conference in Chicago, Ana María Quispe Díaz, center, repeated allegations that Pope Leo XIV, as a bishop in Peru, failed to investigate allegations of abuse she and two sisters reported to him against two priests in his diocese. (NCR screenshot/YouTube)



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A Peruvian woman repeated allegations July 31 that Pope Leo XIV, as a bishop in Peru, failed to investigate allegations of abuse she and two sisters reported to him against two priests in his diocese.

The Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, has repeatedly denied that then-Bishop Robert Prevost did not investigate the allegations.

Ana María Quispe Díaz said that Prevost lied to her about investigating allegations of abuse that she and two other women made against Frs. Eleuterio Vásquez Gonzáles and Ricardo Yesquén Paiva.

Quispe has said Yesquén touched her inappropriately and kissed on the mouth when she was 9 years old, and that Vásquez shared a bed with her and fondled her during a service trip when she was a minor.

Quispe made the public remarks, her first since Pope Leo XIV's election, at a news conference in Chicago, the pope's hometown. She said her two children were her motivation to go public with her allegations.

National Catholic Reporter viewed a video of the news conference made available by the organizer, Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, a victims' rights group, which provided NCR correspondence between Quispe and the diocese.

NCR does not name people who say they were victims of sexual assault unless they consent to being identified or tell their stories publicly, as Quispe did at the news conference.

"Prevost never investigated, Prevost never offered us psychological support," Quispe said in Spanish at the press conference.

Robert Prevost celebrates Mass in 2023 in Peru.

Then-Bishop Robert Prevost distributes Communion during Mass in Chiclayo, Peru, in this screengrab from a video obtained on social media and released on April 11, 2023. (OSV News/Lambayeque Regional Governor Jorge Perez Flores via Reuters)

The Chiclayo Diocese has flatly denied Quispe's version of events.

In statements, the diocese has said that Prevost commissioned a preliminary investigation into the allegations raised by the three sisters, and that he submitted its findings to the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on July 21, 2022.

The diocese said Prevost also sent to the dicastery on April 3, 2023, the results of the local prosecutor's investigation, which found that the case lacked corroborating evidence and exceeded the statute of limitations. Because of the local prosecutor's decision, the dicastery closed the case.

Quispe has previously alleged on social media that the diocese mishandled her case. Members of SNAP said they spent time with Quispe in Peru after the conclave that elected Leo.

In March, almost a month before Pope Francis died, SNAP sent a complaint against then-Cardinal Prevost to Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and the heads of two other Vatican dicasteries. It alleges that Prevost "intended to interfere with or to avoid a civil or canonical investigation, whether administrative or penal, against certain clerics of the Diocese of Chiclayo."

Prevost, who became Pope Leo May 8, led the Diocese of Chiclayo from 2014 to 2023. In April 2022, Quispe and her sisters met with Prevost to present their allegations against the priests.

In November 2023, Quispe wrote on Facebook that in their meeting, Prevost said he believed the women, encouraged them to file a case with the civil authorities and said he would ask Vásquez to leave the parish where he was ministering.

The diocese said that it has acted in accordance with church guidelines since receiving the allegations and had enforced a "prohibition on exercising priestly ministry in public." Social media posts, however, showed Vásquez concelebrating Mass with Prevost in March 2023, and leading in a Eucharistic procession in the diocese while surrounded by children in June 2023.

In December 2023, Bishop Guillermo Antonio Cornejo Monzón, then-apostolic administrator of the Chiclayo Diocese following Prevost's promotion to the Vatican, reopened the case and said he had again asked Vásquez not to celebrate Mass and that the priest was being investigated.

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A letter provided by SNAP network showed that the diocese wrote to Quispe July 1 this year stating that Vásquez had requested to be removed from the clerical state and "is suspended from all priestly functions." It said that his laicization would take "around six or seven months to complete."

Quispe and the other women, in return, asked for public clarification on why Vásquez requested being removed from the clerical state since it "prevented a real investigation from being launched."

The diocese had said that a case was not opened against Yesquén, who was unable to defend himself due to a "degenerative psychiatric illness." He had not exercised his priestly ministry in years, the diocese said.

In the letter, the diocese said it "remains available to cover the costs of therapy" and noted that therapy that had taken place since April had stopped and not resumed.

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In the Chicago news conference, however, Quispe said the diocese's claim that she and the other accusers were offered psychological support from the moment they brought the allegations to the diocese was "absolutely untrue."

She said that in the meeting with Prevost they were urged to report the case to civil authorities "because in the church there was no form to investigate, to denounce." Thus, a civil case "could function so that they could maybe do something within the church."

That, Quispe said, was untrue.

"He lied to us," she said. She noted that Prevost had previously investigated allegations of abuse involving the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, a controversial lay-led society of apostolic life that Pope Francis officially suppressed in January.

Prevost's advocacy on behalf of numerous Sodalitium victims of physical, psychological and spiritual abuse is largely credited with triggering a Vatican investigation into the once powerful Peruvian group and ultimately toppling it.

In an interview following the conclave that elected Pope Leo, Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said that reports of abuse received by the heads of dicasteries while they were diocesan bishops were handled "according to applicable norms, and they were sent from the diocesan bishops to the competent dicastery for review and evaluation of the accusations."

Though Parolin did not explicitly mention him by name, Prevost was then the head of the Dicastery of Bishops after serving as a diocesan bishop in Chiclayo, where he was presented with the allegations of abuse.