News



Valladolid Archbishop Luis Argüello, president of the Spanish bishops' conference, speaks at Mass in Madrid in a Nov. 19, 2024, file photo. (OSV News/Courtesy of Valencia Archdiocese)

Junno Arocho Esteves

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 9, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Victims of abuse are cautiously optimistic regarding an agreement between the Catholic Church and the Spanish government that would seek to provide reparations to victims of clergy sexual abuse.

The agreement was signed Jan. 8 between Spain's Justice Minister Félix Bolaños; Archbishop Luis Argüello of Valladolid, president of the Spanish bishops' conference; and Dominican Fr. Jesús Díaz Sariego, president of the Spanish Conference of Religious, known by the Spanish acronym CONFER.

"Today, we are a better democracy because we have settled a historical debt and delivered justice," Bolaños said at the signing, according to the Spanish newspaper El País.

"We have settled the moral debt we owed to the victims of the church who, for decades, have faced a wall of silence, cover-up, and incomprehension, and suffered irreparable moral damage. Today, we can say that the state is fulfilling its obligations to the victims," he said.

At a press conference after the signing of the agreement, Argüello said the agreement was "a step" toward the church's "moral obligation" to victims of clergy sexual abuse.



Spanish Justice Minister Félix Bolaños (Wikimedia Commons/Franciscomoi)

He also noted the church had requested the agreement include a tax exemption for reparations received by victims, both for those already compensated and "those that may come in the future."

"We want to be coherent with saying that victims, reparations, the proposal of adequate prevention measures, and comprehensive reparations, are at the center of the life of the church and the life of society," he said.

Argüello also said the bishops' conference had "received in these months the explicit support of the Holy See," particularly from the Vatican Secretariat of State and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

"We received a positive assessment of the work done, including an invitation to share what we are doing with some other bishops' conferences," the archbishop said.

Speaking to the Spanish national radio network RNE, Manuel Barbero, representative of victims abused by members of the Marist Brothers, said that while the agreement was "historic," it was important to be "vigilant to ensure it is carried out rigorously."

"It is not about conducting a witch hunt, but about seeking recognition — recognition by the church and reparation by the church," Barbero said.

The agreement, which was posted on the Spanish bishops' conference website, establishes the creation of a mixed system to provide reparations in cases where criminal action is no longer possible due to the statute of limitations or the death of the abuser.

Spain's Justice Ministry and its national ombudsman will evaluate cases that qualify for reparations, which will then be passed on to the church's advisory commission. The commission will then agree or oppose the reparation proposal.

Advertisement

Once a consensus is reached among all parties, including the victim, the reparations will be finalized. If there is a disagreement and all parties are in deadlock, the ombudsman may make a final decision.

In December 2022, El País said it conducted a three-year investigation into sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Spain and uncovered 251 cases of abuse dating back 80 years. The investigation, which began in 2018, revealed an estimated 1,246 victims of abuse in the Catholic Church.

Following public outcry over the revelations, a proposal was made and passed by the Spanish Parliament to establish a government-led commission to investigate the church's handling of abuse allegations.

The Spanish bishops' conference, which was initially hesitant to establish an independent commission, made an about-face in 2022 and hired a law firm to conduct a yearlong investigation into clerical sexual abuse in the country.

The findings of the Spanish bishops' investigation, which were published in June 2023, found evidence of 728 abusers in the church, according to the testimony of 927 victims.

However, the government's independent commission, led by Angel Gabilondo, Spain's national ombudsman, revealed in its 700-page report, published in October 2023, that more than 200,000 minors were abused by clergy since 1940. It also stated that when accounting for abuses committed by lay members of the Church, the number of victims rose to 400,000.