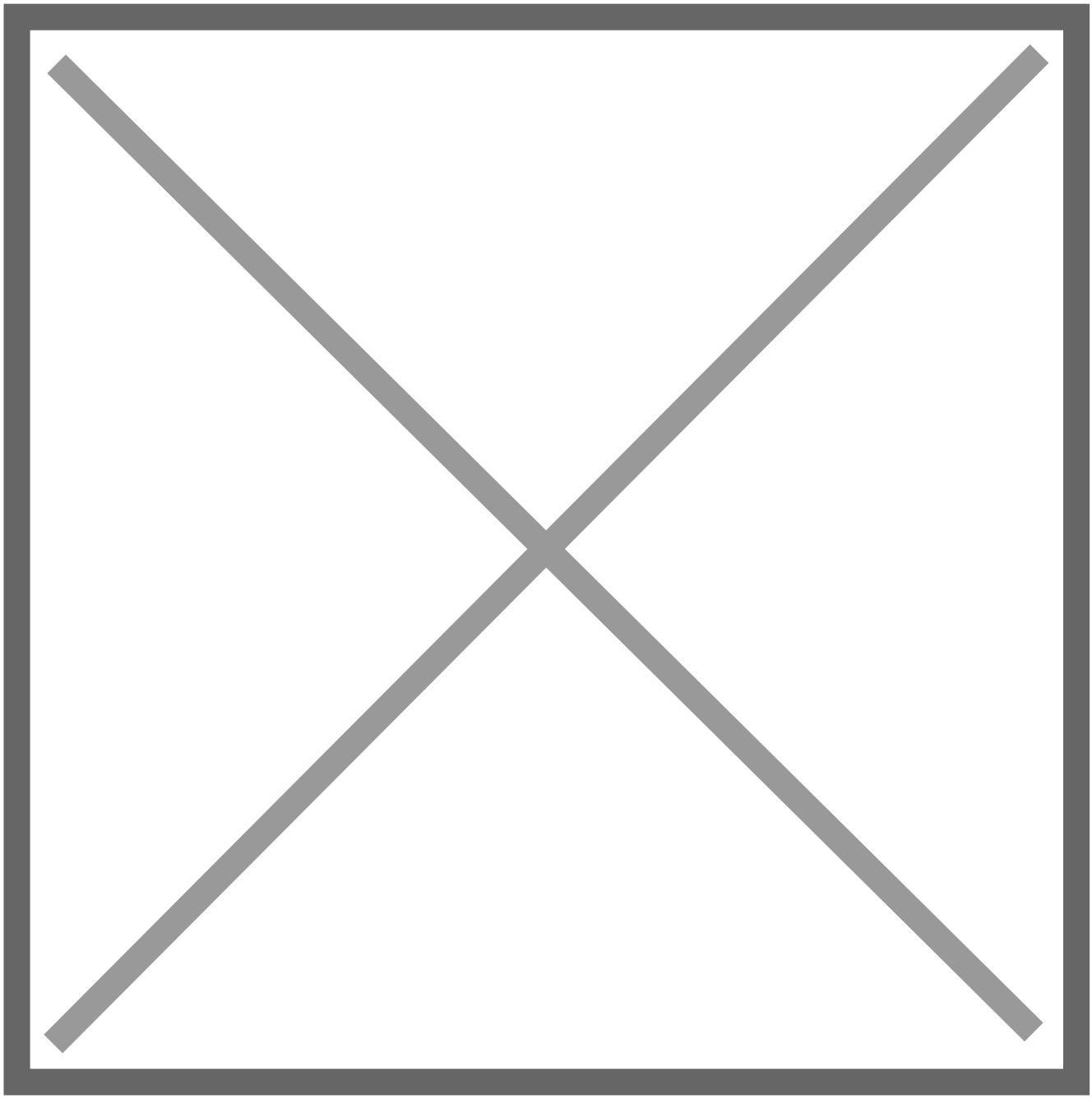
Vatican
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Chilean journalist and survivor Camila Bustamante poses for a photo with Pope Leo XIV at the Apostolic Nunciature in Lima, Peru Nov. 12, 2026. Bustamante was among six survivors who met privately with the pope during the final leg of his apostolic visit to Latin America. (OSV News/Courtesy of Camila Bustamante)

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When Chilean journalist and survivor Camila Bustamante walked into the apostolic nunciature in Peru to meet with Pope Leo XIV, she knew she only had a few minutes to discuss decades of documented cases of abuse, pain and frustration on behalf of survivors.

"I was a little nervous because, since we only had a few minutes, I wanted to make the most of that time to tell him everything I needed to say," Bustamante said in a Nov. 17 interview with OSV News, adding she was "trying to organize my thoughts and ideas so I wouldn't forget anything."

Bustamante was among six survivors who met with the pope in Lima Nov. 12 during the final leg of his apostolic visit to Latin America.

According to a Vatican statement, those present "suffered abuse by members of the clergy and ecclesial institutions in the country, some of whom are former members of groups linked to the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae," the lay movement suppressed by Pope Francis in 2025.

Leo "met with each person individually, listening to their stories of suffering and their pain, and reflecting with them on how to foster a change in mentality through listening to victims, seeking the truth, pathways to healing, and a commitment to

creating safe environments," the Vatican said.

During his Nov. 16 in-flight press conference back to Rome, Leo said that while he cannot "listen to every single person throughout the world," the meeting was "a gesture that expresses a desire to be close to victims and to help them find a path that, perhaps in small steps, can lead them towards genuine healing."

"At the same time, it’s a commitment to keep working on prevention so that such things never happen again," he said. "It's also an appeal to bishops and pastoral workers in their dioceses. Those of you closest to these situations must fulfill your duty to accompany the victims. You yourselves must take responsibility for accompanying them and helping them obtain justice."

'The most serious cases' discussed with the pope

Bustamante was a member of the Siervas del Plan de Dios (Servants of the Plan of God), a community of consecrated laywomen within Sodalitium founded by Luis Fernando Figari.

She spent over a decade documenting psychological manipulation, isolation and mistreatment within the women's branch in Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador, culminating in her 2022 book, "Siervas: El Historial de Abuso de las Monjas Sodalicias" ("Servants: The History of Abuse of the Sodalitium Nuns").

In April 2025, the group announced it was "suppressed due to the lack of initial charism and the abuses committed within them."

Responding to OSV News questions, Bustamante said she discussed "the most serious cases" she documented and urged the pope "to continue the reparations process for the victims without letting it stall."

She "also asked him to promote further Church investigations so that we can uncover — or more than just uncover, prevent — cases as grave as the ones we have seen so far."

"The truth is that he was very warm and approachable," she said. "He told me he was deeply committed to the issue, that he understood the victims' frustration, and that he wasn't asking for patience, but that he truly was working on this entire situation."

Survivors in Peru were cautiously optimistic when the Vatican announced in late October that the pope would meet with victims. However, Red de Sobrevivientes Peru (Survivors Network Peru) criticized the selection process, arguing certain survivors were excluded.

Nevertheless, the group's president, José Enrique Escardó — the first Sodalitium member to denounce abuse — said while he was pleased Bustamante and others spoke to the pope, he doubted "the promises (Leo) made at that meeting will be fulfilled."

Recalling his 2025 meeting with then-Cardinal Robert Prevost, Escardó said "there has not been a single step forward."

"We victims are asking for action, not just words of support," he wrote in a Nov. 13 post on X.

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The Church 'still has a great deal of work to do'

Bustamante told OSV News she "never requested a meeting" with Leo, was invited directly by the nunciature and did not know "the reasons why I or the others were invited."

"None of the other attendees have spoken to the press — in fact, I asked a few of them, and they didn't want any media attention," she said.

Bustamante called it "completely valid" that victims of Sodalitium and other survivors feel excluded "after having spoken out for so many years — and after having been mistreated by the Church institution for so many years."

"I believe it is valid that both victims of the Sodalitium and of other institutions — as also happened in Argentina, for example — feel they haven't been heard and feel the Church still has things to do for them," she said. "I believe the Church must continue listening to this; it has to be permanent, not something that only happens during an apostolic visit, because the frustration is real."

"Just because I met with the pope doesn't mean I think the situation is resolved or under control. I believe the Church still has a great deal of work to do," she added.

Survivor: 'The victim is erased when she is a woman'

In a separate interview with Spanish news agency EFE, Bustamante said the pope seemed "surprised" by some abuses she described within the Servants of the Plan of God.

She told OSV News that while she didn't know what specifically caught him off guard, his expression showed "concern, surprise and pain."

Bustamante said she told Leo that victims of the female branch had "always been rendered invisible" and discredited as "just overly sensitive girls who didn't understand what we had experienced."

"I also believe that within the Church, the victim is erased when she is a woman — and even more so when the abuser is a woman," she added. "People struggle to place a woman in the role of the mistreater, the female abuser. So I think it also has to do with the lens through which we view abuse, and there is still a long way to go in understanding these dynamics."

Bustamante said she urged Leo to finalize reparations, warning that delays compound victims' suffering.

While financial or institutional measures won't erase trauma, she said completing reparations is basic accountability and requires resolving the backlog of substantiated cases.

"We must not forget that these abuses occurred under the protection of the Church, and that in many instances the Church bore responsibility for covering them up and allowing them to continue. Therefore, the very first thing that must be done is to see this reparations process through to completion," she told OSV News.

She also asked the pope to promote further investigations, noting that after publishing her book, she received complaints "from former religious sisters of other congregations that have never been investigated."

Bustamante met the pope as advocate for other survivors

Leo, she added, told her "he was aware that these structures are replicated in other cult-like, pseudo-religious organizations, and that he understood this call for proactivity."

"He did not speak to me at any point about the specific commission currently handling the Sodalitium case, nor did I speak to him specifically about public figures or public bodies; we spoke more in general terms."

Bustamante said that while she also suffered abuse within the Sodalitium family, she chose not to make her own case public so she could keep the spotlight on other women.

"I sat across from the pope from that perspective — as someone who was also a victim of different types and degrees of abuse within the Sodalitium, and also as someone who has been able to gather the testimonies of other women to bring them into the light," she said.

Bustamante hoped Leo would move forward with "concrete actions," noting that for now, survivors are "betting on trust."

"I do not know the pope personally; I had never had the opportunity to meet him before. Therefore, all I have is the option to trust what he told me," she said. "I think the only concrete way to track progress on the Sodalitium case is to watch the speed given to the reparations process and the closure of reparations for the victims. That is where we will have a real barometer of whether this is moving forward or not."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Uruguay, Argentina and Peru** feature series. View the full series.