

## No sanction for Spanish king signing abortion law

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**MADRID, Spain** -- If King Juan Carlos of Spain signs a new law easing restrictions on abortion, as he is constitutionally required, the country's bishops will not take action against him, the general secretary of the Spanish bishops' conference said.

As the law was being debated, Spain's bishops had said Catholic members of parliament who vote to liberalize abortion would place themselves outside the church and should not receive Communion.

"That his majesty the king must sanction this law with his signature is a unique situation. No other citizen would encounter this," and so "general principles" cannot be applied, said Auxiliary Bishop Juan Antonio Martinez Camino of Madrid, conference general secretary.

Bishop Martinez spoke to the press at the end of a meeting of the permanent commission of the bishops' conference Feb. 25, which also was the day after Spain's Parliament narrowly approved a law easing longstanding restrictions on abortion.

In a vote of 132-126, members of Parliament passed the law removing all restrictions on abortion up to the 14th week of pregnancy and extending legal abortion to 22 weeks of gestation if the life of the mother is at risk or if the fetus shows signs of serious malformations.

Asked repeatedly about church sanctions against the king and against Catholic members of Parliament who voted for the law, Bishop Martinez said the bishops "have excommunicated no one," but those who actively supported the law have seriously separated themselves from the church and should not receive Communion.

The situation of a politician who can vote and the king who must sign the law "are different considerations," he said.

Pro-life Catholics have begun an Internet-based petition drive to convince King Juan Carlos not to sign the law.

"Please, Your Majesty, do not sanction this new holocaust with your signature," the petition said. "Without your signature the law will not go into effect. In this way, the pain and suffering of thousands of women will be avoided and, more importantly, an infinite number of defenseless lives will be saved."

By noon Feb. 26, the Internet site reported receiving almost 57,700 signatures.

The late King Baudouin of Belgium faced a similar dilemma in 1990 when his nation's Parliament passed a bill liberalizing abortion.

Saying his conscience and Catholic faith would not allow him to sign the bill, he worked out an agreement with parliament allowing him to resign for less than 48 hours. During his temporary abdication, the country's council of ministers assumed the king's powers and signed the bill. Parliament then reinstated the king.

Ending their spring meeting Feb. 25, members of the permanent commission of the Spanish bishops' conference said Spain's new law takes "attacks on the life of those about to be born, converting them into a right."

The new law marks "a serious step back in the protection of the right to life" and an abandonment of pregnant women who need assistance and support in bringing their pregnancies to term, the bishops said.

The statement also said the bishops wanted to remind "women tempted to abort or who have already experienced this tragedy that they always will find mercy and comfort in the Catholic community. As a mother, the church understands their problems and will not leave them on their own."

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