

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 5, 2013 at 5:29am

Victims' group criticizes Cardinal George

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NCR Today

Conclave 2013

Rome — Comments made Monday by Chicago Cardinal Francis George regarding a global "zero tolerance" policy for priests who sexually abuse children do not go far enough, a victims' advocacy group said Tuesday.

"The cover-up by bishops, cardinals and popes is criminal activity," wrote Kristine Ward, the chair of the National Survivor Advocates Coalition, in the organization's daily newsletter.

"What's missing in these interviews is calling a spade a spade," Ward continued. "What perpetrator priests did needs to be laid on the table in this pre-voting days right alongside what bishops and cardinals and popes did.

"How will Cardinals do that while they sitting beside Cardinal Roger Mahony, Cardinal Sean Brady, Cardinal Justin Rigali, and Cardinal Godfried Daneels?"

George, who will vote in the upcoming papal election, spoke to journalists Monday between sessions of the first day of pre-conclave meetings at the Vatican.

Asked if he would consider a candidate's approach to "sexual misconduct by clergy" when choosing the next pope, George said "that will be an important issue" because sex abuse is a "terrible wound on the body of the church."

"Whoever's elected pope," the cardinal said, "obviously has to accept the universal code of the church now, which is zero tolerance for anyone who has ever abused a minor child, (who) therefore may not remain in public ministry in the church. So that has to be accepted."

Ward's remarks referred to scandals which have plagued Mahony, Brady, Rigali and Daneels regarding their handling of priest-abusers. Each is expected to vote for the next pope.

Mahony, who was disgraced when an LA court ordered the release of some 12,000 documents showing questionable handling of priests by him in the 1980s, has said the Vatican told him to attend the conclave.

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