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Indian cardinal opposed to 'criminalization' of same-sex relationships

by Anto Akkara by Catholic News Service

Bangalore, India — The head of the Catholic church in India has reiterated its opposition to "criminalization" of homosexuality.

"It is for the government and the legislature to sort out the situation now," Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai said after the Supreme Court declined to review its December ruling on an anti-sodomy law.

The December ruling served to reinstate Section 337 of India's penal code, a law that outlawed homosexuality, making it a felony subject to fines and sentences of up to 10 years to life in prison.

Asked about the gay groups and human rights activists criticizing the court's decision and even targeting the church, Gracias told Catholic News Service that while the church was opposed to "criminalizing homosexuality, we are not supporting gay marriages."

"The Catholic church does not want homosexuals to be treated as criminals," he said. "People with different sexual orientations also need pastoral care."

"The church stand is, 'Who am I to judge them?' as the Holy Father has said," Gracias added, referring to Pope Francis' July 28 remarks about homosexuality during a news conference with reporters flying with him from Brazil to Rome.

"I have told our priests to be sensitive when dealing with this subject," said Gracias, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and one of eight members of the Council of Cardinals appointed by Pope Francis to work on reform in the Roman Curia and advise him on church governance.

M.P. Raju, a Catholic who is a senior lawyer with the Supreme Court, told CNS the court's stance effectively has "thrown the ball back to the government."

"The government has to amend the archaic legislation. But the question is whether it will do it with the elections approaching," Raju said.

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