

# Abuse survivors demand Vatican transparency, accountability

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press, February 20, 2019, 12:40 p.m.



Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) President Tim Lennon from Tucson, AZ, center, and SNAP members Esther Hatfield Miller from Los Angeles, CA, left, and Carol Midboe from Austin, TX, pose for pictures during interviews with the media in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican during Pope Francis' general audience, Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2019. LUIGI NAVARRA/ASSOCIATED PRESS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Survivors of clergy sexual abuse met with organizers of a Vatican prevention summit Wednesday and demanded transparency, zero tolerance for abuse and for religious superiors to be held accountable when they protect priests who rape and molest children.

The survivors met for more than two hours with the Vatican's lead sex abuse investigator and other members of the organizing committee for the four-day summit starting Thursday. The event, which Pope Francis convened, is taking place amid intense scrutiny after new allegations of abuse and cover-up last year sparked a credibility crisis for the Catholic Church hierarchy.

Phil Saviano, an American who played a crucial role in exposing clergy abuse in the United States decades ago, said after the survivors' meeting that he argued for the Vatican to release the names of abusive priests around the world along with their case files.

"Do it to launch a new era of transparency," Saviano said he told the summit committee in a letter and in person. "Do it to break

the code of silence. Do it out of respect for the victims of these men, and do it to help prevent these creeps from abusing any more children.”

The Vatican had asked Chilean survivor Juan Carlos Cruz, who last year helped open Francis’ eyes to the seriousness of the abuse scandal, to arrange the meeting.

Cruz invited a dozen representatives of some of the more vocal advocacy groups that have long demanded accountability from the Vatican, including SNAP, Ending Clergy Abuse and French group La Parole Liberee.

“The culture of cover-up needs to end,” he said after the meeting, which was held on the grounds of a gated Vatican residence with protesters waiting outside.

More than 30 years after the scandal first erupted in Ireland and Australia and 20 years after it hit the U.S., bishops in many parts of Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia either deny clergy sex abuse exists in their regions or downplay the problem.

Francis announced the summit in September. Realizing that church leaders in some parts of the world still didn’t “get it” about abuse, he invited the presidents of every bishops’ conferences for a tutorial on preventing abuse, investigating cases and listening to victims.

Jamaican survivor Denise Buchanan, who attended the organizing meeting, demanded to know why the Vatican wasn’t implementing zero-tolerance policies on sex abuse across the board. The U.S. bishops’ conference is considered a model for requiring any priest who is found guilty of molesting a child to be removed permanently from ministry.

“What is the holdup in implementing zero tolerance?” Buchanan said. “It is like, ‘Oh, we already have the laws, we just need to implement the laws.’ Obviously, the laws are not working because children are being raped right now.”

In a statement after the meeting ended, the organizing committee thanked the victims for “sincerity, the depth and the strength of their testimonies.”

They said the survivors’ input would help them to understand the “gravity and urgency” of the problem during the summit.

The committee included Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, Maltese Archbishop Charles Scicluna, the Vatican’s longtime lead sex abuse investigator; Indian Cardinal Oswald Gracias; German Jesuit the Rev. Hans Zollner, an expert in child protection. The Rev. Federico Lombardi, the former Vatican spokesman who is moderating the summit, also participated in the meeting with abuse survivors.

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