

Vatican delays trial of pope's ex-diplomat accused of child porn, pedophilia

POSTED 5:05 PM, JULY 11, 2015, BY CNN WIRE



A former papal ambassador accused of sexually abusing minors has been hospitalized in an intensive care unit — pushing back his trial once set to start Saturday in Vatican City.

Jozef Wesolowski, 66, was under house arrest in Vatican City when he fell ill Friday night and was rushed to a public hospital.

A judge held a short hearing and adjourned Wesolowski's trial to a yet undetermined date, the Vatican Press Office said. It did not provide any details on his condition.

Wesolowski, 66, is the highest-ranking Catholic official arrested for alleged sexual abuse of minors.

In addition to sexual abuse allegations, he is accused of possession of child pornography during his time as papal nuncio — or ambassador — to the Dominican Republic. The maximum punishment for these crimes could be 9 years in prison, although sentencing is entirely at the discretion of the judges.

The Vatican, which operates as a city-state, has its own judicial system. This is the first trial on charges of sex abuse to be heard by the Vatican tribunal, which is composed of 3 lay Italian judges.

Antonello Blasi, lawyer for the ex-archbishop, said he learned of his client's hospitalization upon arriving in court.

"I take note of this news with regret," Blasi said in court. "because the defendant was willing to be present."

Blasi told reporters that he had seen Wesolowski three days ago and that he seemed in good health, as good as could be expected for a man of his age and

considering the upcoming trial.

Link to child abuse, pedophilia

The Vatican said it was investigating Wesolowski two years ago, and it defrocked him last year.

An internal church report linked him to child abuse and pedophilia, said Monsignor Agripino Nunez Collado, a Catholic University rector.

At the time, Dominican Attorney General Francisco Dominguez Brito said Wesolowski's case has various ramifications.

"Here we have to work with two legal aspects, first national laws and also international laws in his status as a diplomat, which implies other mechanisms of investigation and judgment," he said.

Test of pope's ruling

Pope Francis announced in 2013 that he was extending the court's jurisdiction in sex abuse cases to include papal diplomats, making Wesolowski's case the first test of the ruling.

He is not only charged with offenses during his five years as nuncio of the Dominican Republic, but also with child pornography charges committed in Rome between August 2013, when he was recalled, and September 2014, when he was arrested.

Pornographic images and videos

Last year, Italy's Corriere della Sera reported that Wesolowski's laptop contained more than 100,000 files with pornographic images and videos, some showing naked teens ages 13 to 17 forced to have sexual relations with each other or with adults.

The Vatican charges also name Francisco Javier Occi Reyes, a deacon and assistant to ex-archbishop Wesolowski in the Dominican Republic, for having participated in the procurement and corruption of adolescents for the purposes of sexual abuse.

'Act decisively'

After his election to the papacy, Francis told a senior Vatican official to "act decisively" against sexual abuse and carry out "due proceedings against the guilty."

He also made it a crime to abuse children sexually or physically on Vatican grounds. The acts were already crimes under church law, but are now specifically

outlawed within the Vatican city-state, which is home to hundreds of people.

Before arriving in the Dominican Republic seven years ago, Wesolowski was nuncio to Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

He began his career as a priest in Poland in 1972, and became a bishop in 2000.

The trial was postponed as Pope Francis visits Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay.



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