



Pope Francis' credibility regarding clerical abuse has been undermined in Chile

Pope Francis' trip to South America reflected the Pope's usual attention to the reality of the sufferings of the poor and marginalized native populations. But his visit also demonstrated the Pope's lack of clarity on prioritizing the victims and survivors of clerical sexual abuse, and further undermined the Church's efforts to show its repentance on this important issue.

The pope asked for forgiveness and expressed shame for clerical sex abusers in his address at the "Moneda" before the Chilean civil authorities. Pope Francis also received a delegation of the victims behind closed doors. These were important steps, but he had not show the same openness with the victims of Karadima.

However, these positive events were completely undermined by Pope Francis' saying that those who charged Bishop Juan Barros Madrid of covering up child sexual abuse were guilty of "slander."

Bishop Juan Barros Madrid was appointed Bishop of Osorno in 2015, after his complicity with Karadima became known; prior to that he had been bishop for the Army. His nomination came from the hierarchy in Chile, who were in agreement with the dictatorship of Pinochet and enjoyed the empathy of the Nuncio Angelo Sodano. Bishop Barros was the protector of the serial pedophile Fr Fernando Karadima, an influential and well-known figure amongst the economic and conservative elite in the Catholic world of Santiago. Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors protested his appointment, but Pope Francis proceeded with it. There is no suggestion that Bishop Barros himself was an abuser; but he was certainly aware of the serial abuse of Karadima whom he protected.

A base movement was then born in the Osorno diocese that disputed and rejected the appointment of Barros, asking the pope to revoke it. Pope Francis, speaking with a journalist before leaving Chile, said there was no evidence against Barros and accused the abuse survivors of slander. Yet the Karadima abuse survivors - whom Pope Francis refused to meet - have been confirmed as credible. In fact, Cardinal Seán O'Malley of Boston, who heads up the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, has issued a statement that the pontiff's defense of a Chilean bishop accused of covering up abuse was "a source of great pain" for survivors. There has also been a reply of the speaker of the lay people of Osorno: "The Pope should understand that he is not a jury, he does not have to decide about crimes, that will be judged by a Chilean jury, his duty is to check if the bishop Juan Barros is really a spiritual leader or not, and understand that he is not fulfilling his mission as a bishop: being a sign of unity in a diocese".

We Are Church International (WAC) and the European Network Church on The Move (EN) express their support for the legitimate ecclesiastical protest of the Christians of Osorno and share the opinion of Somos Iglesia Chile (national section of the WAC movement) in this matter. We call on Pope Francis to urgently review his support of Bishop Juan Barros for the good of all the church.

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We Are Church International *founded in Rome in 1996, is a global coalition of national church reform groups. It is committed to the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church based on the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the theological spirit developed from it.*

<https://www.we-are-church.org/413/index.php>

The European Network Church on the Move *is a spontaneous convergence of organizations - associations, communities, informal groups and networks - of European Christians who are in majority Catholic, sharing*
(1) the vision of a Church prophetic, ecumenical, liberating, supporting, loving, which neither excludes nor discriminates and which follows on the steps of Jesus the liberator
(2) the will to work, respecting cultural and religious diversity, for peace, justice, freedom, human rights and democracy, including in the Catholic Church
<http://www.en-re.eu/index.php>