Vatican can be sued over U.S. priest abuse

by UPI

PORTLAND, Ore. - The Vatican can be sued for abuse by its priests, even though the Holy See is considered a sovereign nation, a U.S. appeals court ruled.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, in a Portland, Ore., case, said abuse could be an exception to the 1976 Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, due to the conduct's nature.

A 59-year-old man who alleges he was molested in the 1960s by a religious-order priest at an Oregon Catholic school may therefore pursue his lawsuit against the Holy See, the court said.

The unidentified man may sue the Vatican because the Rev. Andrew Ronan, a Servite Order priest who has since died, allegedly committed the abuse while serving in a religious capacity, the panel ruled.

The man's lawyers hailed the ruling as a watershed moment for clergy-abuse victims who for decades have wanted to hold Catholic hierarchy accountable for protecting allegedly abusive priests, the Chicago Tribune reported.

"They have been choosing for years ... to protect the clerics and not the kids," said the alleged victim's lawyer, Jeff Anderson of Minneapolis.

But Vatican lawyer Jeffrey Lena of Berkeley, Calif., said the ruling actually favored the Vatican by observing that not every action in the church can be traced directly to Rome, the Tribune said.

He did not say if he planned to appeal.

The ruling does not permit victims to sue Pope Benedict XVI, but Anderson said he intended to take testimony from the pontiff.

The pope himself could have prevented abuse in the past few decades, Anderson told the newspaper.

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