

‘Vatican found RJD guilty of sexual abuse of children in Topu Honis’

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Tempotimor (Roma)-In Timor-Leste the trial is taking place against RJD. He is charged with sexual abuse of girls, child pornography and domestic violence, which he allegedly committed when he was still a priest. The Vatican and his former congregation Society of the Divine Word (SVD) already found him guilty and punished him. In this interview father Jose Nicolas Espinosa, Secretary General and spokesperson of the SVD in Rome, explains how the Catholic authorities dealt with this case.

1. At the Vatican in Rome it is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which has the task to oversee investigations against clergy members accused of crimes. Has the Vatican found RJD guilty?

‘Yes. On 6 November 2018 the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) found RJD guilty of the heinous crime of abusing minors in the Topu Honis Shelter,’ says Father Jose Nicolas Espinosa, Secretary General of the SVD in Rome.

2. Was RJD punished by the Vatican?

The Vatican ‘authorized the Superior General of the SVD to impose a perpetual penalty on RJD, being dismissed from the SVD and from the clerical state. This penalty is irreversible, and the Church authorities will not change it.’

3. What is the consequence of this punishment?

‘RJD is expelled from religious life, which means that he is no longer a member of the SVD. RJD is also expelled from the clerical state, which means that he cannot celebrate Mass or perform any action related to the priesthood.’

4. What measures did the SVD take against RJD?

March-April 2018:

- Removal of RJD from the orphanage Topu Honis Shelter.
- Start of the investigation process against RJD.
- On 5 March 2018 there was a phone conference between the SVD in Dili and Rome, during which RJD admitted the accusations saying: ‘This is 100% true.’
- Preventive measures to avert further serious transgressions of the law, such as obliging RJD to refrain from contacting the victims.
- The SVD Regional Superior in Timor Leste was asked to inform the Bishop of the Dili Diocese and the Apostolic Nuntio about the accusations against Mr. RJD.
- The SVD Regional Superior was instructed to report the case to the civil authorities without making known the victims’ names, in case Mr. RJD refused to denounce himself.
- The SVD reported the case to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) at the Vatican.

April 2018

- Further restrictions were imposed on RJD.

May 2018

- The SVD's Superior in Timor-Leste informed the SVD Superior General in Rome that RJD case was reported to the Criminal Investigation Service (CIS) of Timor-Leste.
- The SVD Superior General in Rome asked the SVD in Timor-Leste to cooperate with the Criminal Investigation Service if they needed further information.

July-September 2018

- During these months the SVD's process to investigate Mr. RJD took place, as was requested by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith at the Vatican.

October 2018

- SVD's General Council agreed on 12 October 2018 that the presented facts concerning the crimes committed by RJD constitute proof of a serious crime as well as the repeated legal violation of the vow of chastity and, therefore, are a cause for compulsory dismissal. It was decided that Fr. RJD be dismissed from the Society of the Divine Word.'
- The Superior General sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) at the Vatican the documentation regarding RJD case and requested: to confirm the Decree of Dismissal of RJD from the SVD; and to authorize the SVD's Superior General to issue the Decree of Dismissal of RJD from the clerical state.

November 2018

- On 6 November 2018, the CDF confirmed the Decree of Dismissal of RJD from the SVD, and authorized the Superior General to issue a decree of dismissal of RJD from the clerical state.
- On 16 November 2018, the Superior General issued the Decree of Dismissal of RJD from the clerical state.
- On 30 November 2018 RJD accepted and signed the receipt of both Dismissal Decrees.

February 2019

- Letter, signed by both the Bishop and the SVD Regional Superior in Timor Leste, addressed to the people of the Diocese, informing them about the reasons for which RJD was dismissed from the Society of the Divine Word and the clerical state.

November 2019

- RJD was not accommodated anymore in any SVD house because of the failure of the civil authorities to monitor RJD and his visitors during the period of his stay in the SVD house in Maliana.

September 2020- June 2021

- Collaboration with civil and church authorities and NGOs to investigate the case.

5. Were you shocked by the case?

Yes. The news of RJD sexual abuse of minors came as a shock to the SVD, mainly because he betrayed the victims' trust, the donors and the SVD Superiors. It has become a significant case due to the publicity it has acquired. But since the start, the SVD has handled the case following the Church's protocol on issues of sexual abuse. His dismissal from the congregation and the clerical state proves that the SVD acted fast and adequately to ensure the ecclesiastical penalty for Mr. Daschbach.

6. What's your response to the people in Timor-Leste who say that the accusations against RJD are false and that he is the victim of a conspiracy?

'The investigation process against Mr. RJD, which included his self-denunciation, proved that the accusations of sexual abuse of minors were true.'

7. What's your reaction to the claim of some people that the local SVD priests are accusing RJD just to get the land and the money of Topu Honis?

'Topu Honis' land and money belong to Topu Honis. Therefore, the SVD cannot by any means get hold of the land and the money of Topu Honis.'

8. What's your view on the current trial in Timor-Leste?

'The SVD reiterates that from the very beginning, our congregation has strongly condemned the heinous crimes of Mr. RJD. The SVD has always stood by the victims. We have tried to invite all persons of goodwill to work together to resolve the case honestly, fairly, and justly. We are looking forward with much positivity to rendering possible psychological and spiritual healing and recovery of the victims.'

9. What would you like to say to the victims?

'What happened to you saddens the SVD deeply. We all joined religious life because we felt a divine call. We were anointed and sent to bring good tidings to the poor and especially to set at liberty those bruised. Therefore, RJD sexual abuse of you is a violation by a person you trusted as children and from whom we expected guidance and example. The SVD wants to stress that the congregation cares for you, the victims of the sexual abuse perpetrated by Mr. RJD. We are committed to our efforts in assisting you, the victims.'

10. What would you like to say to the people of Timor-Leste?

'We are aware of how sad it is to know that a well-respected and admired person like RJD could commit the heinous crime of sexual abuse of minors and betray the trust of the persons he was taking care of, his benefactors and the SVD. We believe that to help heal the victims' wounds and to prevent similar crimes, a fair and just trial, in this case, is necessary. We ask the people of Timor-Leste to support the civil authorities in the legal process against RJD". (*)