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Germans slam papal silence

German Catholic politicians and lay activists are urging Pope Benedict to speak out about sexual abuse cases by priests that have shocked the country and led to questions about his management of the crisis.

The calls came amid widespread criticism in the media that the Bavarian-born pontiff made no statement after getting a briefing on the scandals at the Vatican on Friday from the leader of the Church in Germany, Archbishop Robert Zollitsch.

"The Holy Father needs to say something about this," Dirk Taenzler, head of the Federation of German Catholic Youth (BDKJ), told the Berliner Zeitung daily.

"The Church needs to be more honest and stricter with itself, and that naturally includes the pope," Wolfgang Thierse, a vice president of the German parliament and member of the Central Committee of Catholics, told ARD television.

A Vatican prelate, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, said Benedict would soon speak with "his clear and decisive voice, without hiding anything" in an expected letter on similar scandals in Ireland, but gave no date or hint if it would mention Germany.

Fisichella, in an interview with the Milan daily Corriere della Sera, echoed Vatican attacks on the media for pursuing the scandals. "The rage against the pontiff is insane," he said.

German media reports say more than 250 people were abused at Church-run schools in recent decades. **"It's unfortunate that Pope Benedict did not offer any words of sympathy for the victims or seek reconciliation with them," the reformist lay movement We Are Church said.**

In Ireland on Monday, Cardinal Sean Brady dismissed calls to resign for his minor role in a 1975 case where two victims of a wayward priest had to sign oaths of secrecy. The priest later admitted to molesting 90 children over a 40-year period.

At the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, a secularist group accused the Vatican of violating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and being 13 years overdue in filing a report on its compliance with its rules.

"We call on the Holy See ... to open up its files and records to the CRC and state investigators," said Keith Porteous Wood of the International Humanist and ethical Union.

Alois Glueck, a veteran Bavarian politician who is now head of the Central Committee of German Catholics, said the scandals were "the worst strain on our Church I can think of", and called for sweeping changes including reform of priestly celibacy.

In an interview with Munich's Sueddeutsche Zeitung at the weekend, he said helping victims had to take precedence over protecting the Church's image and said anyone opposing change "sins against the victims and the Church".

In Berlin, a German government spokesman told reporters that Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed

Benedict's meeting with Zollitsch as a good sign that the Vatican and the German Catholic Church are working together to solve the problem.

The scandals have threatened to involve Benedict because he agreed to transfer a paedophile priest from northern Germany to Munich for therapy in 1980 while he was archbishop there.

Without his knowledge, the priest was soon put to work with youths in a parish and later abused another child. Benedict's former deputy has taken responsibility for that reassignment.

This news caused an uproar at Sunday Mass in the Bavarian spa town of Bad Toelz, where a local cleric was identified as the priest in question, Munich newspapers reported.

When his pastor hinted at the case in a sermon without naming the priest, a parishioner who was due to be married by the priest in a few weeks shouted out a protest against all the secrecy surrounding the case. Some parishioners walked out.
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