

Report says more than 4,000 children abused by Portugal's Catholic Church



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Lisbon, February 14 (RHC)-- The Portuguese Catholic Church sexually abused at least 4,815 children since 1950, a new report has found. The commission investigating the issue said on Monday that 77 percent of the perpetrators were priests and most of the victims were men.

“[We want] to pay a sincere tribute to those who were abuse victims during their childhood and dared to give a voice to silence,” head of the commission and child psychiatrist Pedro Strecht said. “They are much more than a statistic.” Among other locations, Strecht said the children were abused in catholic schools, priests’ homes, and confessionals.

In October, the experts working on the report said it had recorded 424 legitimate accounts from presumed victims. They warned that their testimony indicated the number of victims was “much larger”. The accounts found “serious situations which persisted for decades ... and in some cases reached epidemic proportions.”

Thousands of reports of paedophilia with the Church have increasingly surfaced worldwide, putting more pressure on Pope Francis to tackle the issue. Portugal’s independent inquiry, commissioned by the Church, began working on its report last year after an investigation in France revealed that about 3,000 priests and religious officials sexually abused more than 200,000 children.

The allegations have come from people of different backgrounds and countries as well as Portuguese nationals living in other countries.

Pope Francis, who is expected to visit Lisbon in August, may meet some of the alleged victims, the auxiliary bishop of Lisbon, Americo Aguiar, said recently.

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