News

by Matters India

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A national group of Catholic women in India has expressed distress about Bishop Franco Mulakkal visiting Pope Francis in the Vatican.

The Sisters in Solidarity on Feb. 21 wrote to the pope that they were distressed to read about his Feb. 8 meeting with Mulakkal. They said they read in an Indian newspaper dated Feb. 15 that the pope was "glad to hear that [Mulakkal] had won the case and consoled him for his suffering."



Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, India, in an undated photo (Photo: CNS/courtesy of the Diocese of Jullundur)

Kochurani Abraham, a feminist theologian and a group member, told Matters India on Feb. 25 that they could deliver the letter to the pope's office and concerned dicasteries only on Feb. 24 through a Rome-based priest. Copies of the letter were also sent to the apostolic nuncio in New Delhi and church leaders in India, Abraham said.

The letter apprised the pope that the rape case involving Mulakkal is not over as he was acquitted only by the trial court, the first rung in India's multilayered appellate system. The group explained that the state of Kerala and the survivor nun have appealed against the verdict in the Kerala High Court.

"Therefore, until the survivor nun has exhausted all avenues of appeal — up to the Supreme Court of India — Bishop Mulakkal cannot claim to have 'won the case' and be freed of the alleged crime of rape," the group asserts.

The "solidarity" that claims to be a group of Catholic women concerned about clergy sexual abuse in the Indian church expressed sadness that the pope, who consoled Mulakkal for his suffering, has failed to recognized the sister's pain and trauma.

"Despite her writing to every ecclesiastical leader she could approach on this matter in India and at the Vatican, including yourself, till date, no one has cared to reach out to the sister. She and her companions continue to suffer much anguish at being ostracized by their own congregational authorities and the repeated attempts to transfer them, which we see as an inhuman attempt to break the survivor nun by destroying her support system," the letter states.

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The group urges the pope to await the judgment of the appellate court before reinvesting Mulakkal with any administrative responsibilities. The letter also points out that the prelate's behavior has caused "a grave scandal."

"We pray that the Holy Spirit will be your guide in discerning and dealing with these critical concerns and allow you to be fair and just to women survivors," concludes

the letter signed by 12 lay women leaders and eight women religious.

The text of the letter:

> February 21, 2023
> To
> His Holiness, Pope Francis,
> Apostolic Palace,
> 00120 Vatican City.
>
> Sub: Concerns of Indian Catholic Women regarding Bishop Franco Mulakkal case.
>
> Dear Pope Francis,
>
> We are a group of Catholic women who are concerned about clergy sexual abuse in the Indian Church. We are distressed to read about the visit of Bishop Franco Mulakkal to you on February 8, 2023 at the Vatican. We read that you were "glad to hear that he had won the case and consoled him for his suffering" (Times of India, Thiruvananthapuram, 15 February 2023).
>
> We wish to bring to your attention the fact that the case is not over. India has an appellate system where a trial court is only the first rung. So, though Bishop Mulakkal was acquitted by the trial court in January 2022, both the State and the survivor nun have appealed to the High Court of Kerala (Appeal petition filed by the State – CrlA 375/22 and Victim Appeal – 7/22). Therefore, until the survivor nun has exhausted all avenues of appeal, i.e. right up to the Supreme Court of India, Bishop Mulakkal cannot claim to have "won the case" and be freed of the alleged crime of rape.
>
> Dear Pope Francis, while you "consoled him for his suffering", we are sad that you have failed to recognize the Sister's pain and trauma as well as those of her companions who stood by her over the past four years. Despite her writing to every ecclesiastical leader she could approach on this matter in India and at the Vatican, including yourself, till date, no one has cared to reach out to the Sister. She and her companions continue to suffer much anguish at being ostracized by their own congregational

authorities and the repeated attempts to transfer them, which we see as an inhuman attempt to break the survivor nun by destroying her support system.

Considering the grave scandal caused by the behaviour of the rape accused Bishop Mulakkal and that the criminal case against him continues in the higher court, we entreat the Holy See to await the judgment of the final appellate court before reinvesting him with any administrative responsibilities.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will be your guide in discerning and dealing with these critical concerns and allow you to be fair and just to women survivors.

In Christ Jesus,

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2. H. E. Msgr. Ilson de JesusMontanari, Secretary, Dicastery for Bishops
3. Cardinal Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer SJ, Prefect, Dicastery for Doctrine of Faith
4. Bishop Charles Jude Scicluna,Secretary, Dicastery for Doctrine of Faith
5. Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, Prefect, Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
6. H.E. Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, New Delhi
7. Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Member of Council of Cardinal Advisers
8. Most Rev. Andrews Thazhath, President, Catholic Bishops Conference India (CBCI)
9. Mar George Njaralakatt, First Vice President, CBCI
10. Joshua Mar Ignathios, Second Vice-President, CBCI
11. Archbishop Felix Machado, Secretary General, CBCI

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