News



Bishop Franco Mulakkal is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Diocese of Jullundur)

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Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of 59-year-old Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, India, who was acquitted last year on charges of raping a nun but may face further legal action since the nun has appealed the verdict.

The Vatican made the announcement June 1.

The bishop said in a video message after the announcement that he decided to resign "for the sake of the Diocese of Jalandhar and for the appointment of a new bishop," AsiaNews reported June 1.

AsiaNews also reported that the apostolic nunciature in India said in a statement that no disciplinary action has been taken against the bishop and that his resignation had been requested "for the good of the church," especially for the good of the diocese, which has been run by an apostolic administrator since 2018.

Francis, who had appointed him to lead the Diocese of Jalandhar in 2013, accepted the bishop's request to be relieved of his duties and appointed an administrator Sept. 20, 2018, just one day before the bishop's arrest.

Police arrested Mulakkal after conducting an investigation that eventually resulted in their filing a 2,000-page charge sheet against the prelate. The police formally charged him in 2019 with rape, harassment, wrongful confinement and criminal intimidation.

Mulakkal's trial began in November 2019, and he was acquitted of all charges in January 2022, after the court decided the prosecution could not prove the allegations against him. The bishop always maintained his innocence and claimed the accusations were baseless.

The former district police chief who investigated the case, Kottayam Superintendent S. Harishankar, had told the media right after the court's verdict that he was disappointed with the outcome.

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"This is an extremely unfortunate verdict. It is shocking for us. We had expected a conviction, fully. We will appeal. We had a lot of corroborative evidence," he had said.

The Kerala High Court has recently allowed for an appeal against the acquittal.

The nun, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus congregation, accused the bishop of raping her more than 13 times between 2014 and 2016 inside her convent in Kerala's Kottayam district. She was a former superior general of the diocesan congregation, which fell under the jurisdiction of Mulakkal in the northern state of Punjab.

The nun had made numerous complaints, including to the Vatican, but claimed she had gotten no church response to her allegations at the time.

The nun had explained in a letter that her abuse had gone on for so long because "I had tremendous fear and shame to bring this out into the open. I feared suppression of the congregation and threats to my family members."

The International Union of Superiors General has called on women religious who have suffered abuse to come forward and report it to their congregations and church and state authorities.

In a statement published on its website in November 2018, it said, "If the UISG receives a report of abuse, we will be a listening presence and help the person to have the courage to bring the complaint to the appropriate organizations."