

South African Cardinal Apologizes for Saying Paedophilia Not a Crime

A South African cardinal on Monday apologized for offending victims of child abuse when he described paedophilia as an illness and not a crime in a media interview.

Victims' rights groups and others said the comments by Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier, the Catholic Archbishop of Durban, comments were insensitive, especially given perceptions the Catholic Church has not done enough to root out abuse.

"I apologize sincerely and unreservedly to all who were offended by the botched interview, and especially to those who have been abused and need every help and support that the Church can give," Napier said in a statement.

Napier, one of the 115 cardinals who took part in the Vatican conclave that elected Pope Francis, had told BBC Radio 5 that paedophilia was a "disorder" that needed to be treated.

"From my experience, paedophilia is actually an illness. It's not a criminal condition, it's an illness," he had said.

He also told the BBC he knew of at least two priests who became paedophiles after they were abused as children and therefore required treatment, not punishment.

"That's when the wheels came off. I now stand accused of saying that paedophilia is a mental condition or disorder and not a crime," Napier said in his statement.

"Child sexual abuse is a heinous crime among other things because of the damage it does to the child. In that concern I include the abused who has become an abuser."

One prominent South African presenter, Justice Malala, named Napier “loser of the week” on his television show and said the Cardinal’s remarks were an embarrassment to Catholics.

Francis, the first non-European pope in nearly 1,300 years, has signaled a sharp change of style from his predecessor, Benedict, for the Church, which is beset by scandals, intrigue and strife.

He said on Saturday the church should be poor and remember that its mission is to serve the poor.

Reporting by David Dolan; Editing by Alistair Lyon

© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.