

# NEWS BRIEFING

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

## More Argentina investigations

The widening scope of the Church's sex abuse problem reached **Argentina** last week, as officials raided a Catholic-run school for children with hearing disabilities. Authorities seized documents from the Antonio Provolo Institute in the city of La Plata to investigate claims of sexual abuse. Two other Provolo institutes have been linked to sexual abuse cases, one in the Argentinian city of Mendoza, and another in Verona, Italy.

Argentinian media reported that 28 students who attended the La Plata Provolo school between 1982 and 2002 had reported abuse. The former students have reported abuse by one priest and two lay people who worked at the school. The Provolo schools are part of the Maria Company for the Education of the Deaf and Mute, based in Verona. The Provolo school in the Mendoza province of Argentina was the subject of an investigation that led to the arrest of two priests, Nicola Corradi and Horacio Corbacho, and three other former employees in 2016. Corradi has also been accused of abuse at the Provolo school in Verona before he was sent to Argentina.



On the night of Sunday 2 September **Brazil's National Museum** was destroyed by fire. Considered one of the most important cultural and scientific institutions in Latin America, the museum housed 20 million items. Authorities

are still determining the extent of the losses. The museum officials have said that budget cuts in recent years by the federal government made renovations impossible. Bishop Roberto Francisco Ferreria Paz, a member of Brazil's Episcopal Pastoral Commission for Culture and Education, called the fire "a true tragedy that speaks to the neglect of the public patrimony, and the lack of preventative policies for cultural goods, which are a patrimony for all of humanity, with an incalculable value".



Syria and Russia last weekend carried out their most intensive air raids in weeks on rebel positions in the northern province of **Idlib**. On Saturday, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a monitoring body, and the opposition-affiliated Idlib Media Centre said that government helicopters dropped 19 barrel bombs on targets in Idlib and northern Hama, and Russian warplanes had staged 68 strikes. Idlib is the last major rebel-held area in Syria.

Pope Francis last week appealed for peace and dialogue as the Syrian government prepared to launch the strikes. At his Sunday Angelus, Francis warned that "the winds of war continue to blow" in the country. An attack on the Syrian province's nearly 3 million people would cause "a humanitarian catastrophe", he said.

## Cardinal calls for end to 'war'

In his sermon in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna on the Nativity of Our Lady last week, **Cardinal Christoph Schönborn** said the present conflicts in the Church were

"particularly painful, as when bishops and cardinals adopt stands for and against the Pope one can almost speak of a war in the Church – and that against the background of the shattering clerical abuse drama". The previous day, in his weekly column for the Vienna free paper *Heute* of 7 September, Cardinal Schönborn strongly defended the Pope and criticised those who accuse him of hushing up clergy sexual abuse. "The Pope's open manner and his habit of calling a spade a spade have not met with sympathy everywhere – and also not with everyone in the Vatican," he pointed out.

Hundreds of ethnic Karen in **Myanmar** have sought refuge in camps to avoid renewed fighting between the military and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in the south-east of the country. Some 300 Karen fled their homes to escape the fighting in Hpapun township on 29 August and 1 September. The displaced Karen are taking refuge in Myaing Gyi Ngu, where more than 4,700 internally displaced people have taken refuge at two camps since 2016. Some 20 per cent of the Karen people are Christian.



The Indian Catholic bishops' conference has described the Supreme Court's decision to **decriminalise homosexual acts** between consenting adults as morally unacceptable. The court ruled on 6 September that homosexual acts between adults are no longer a crime, striking down the colonial-era law that made them punishable by a jail term of up to 10 years. "What is legal is not equal to moral acceptability," said a

statement issued by Fr Stephen Fernandes, secretary to the Indian bishops' office for justice, peace and development. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board stated: "Legalising homosexuality is against Indian values and culture. The government must pass a bill to protect the rights of women, as they are the major victims of legalised homosexuality." The senior leader of the Hindu nationalist BJP, Subramanian Swamy, said in response to the judgment that homosexuality is a genetic disorder.

Following the announcement that US will withdraw all aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for **Palestine Refugees** (UNRWA), the Catholic aid agency Cafod has called for greater action from the international community to support the five million registered Palestinian refugees. Leila el Ali, Director of Cafod's partner in Lebanon, Association Najdeh, said: "We are concerned about the cuts in funding to UNRWA, which will further deprive vulnerable refugees of the right to shelter, health and a dignified life. Furthermore, the cuts have a political dimension, which is to dismantle UNRWA, thereby seeking to undermine the legal status of Palestinian refugees."

A group of nuns took to the streets last Saturday in the city of **Kochi** in Kerala, in south-west India, protesting against the delay in action against a Jalandhar bishop, Franco Mulakkal, who is accused of sexually exploiting a nun. The nuns, along with activists, staged a sit-in at the High Court junction in the city, saying they had been denied justice by Church authorities and police.

"More than 70 days have passed since the nun filed a police complaint against the bishop. We have also given clinching evidence. It seems the police are reluctant to take action, due to pressure. Church and police both let us down. Now, we pin our hopes on the judiciary," a nun who did not want to be named said.

Compiled by **James Roberts**

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