News



Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, India, is led away for questioning by police Sept. 21, 2018, on the outskirts of Cochin. A Catholic nun who accused Mulakkal of raping her more than a year ago wrote India's National Human Rights Commission Oct. 19, 2019, accusing the prelate of being behind a defamation campaign against her. (CNS/Reuters/Sivaram V)

by Catholic News Service

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A Catholic nun who accused a bishop of raping her more than a year ago has approached India's federal rights commission, accusing the prelate of being behind a defamation campaign against her.

However, a spokesman for the Jalandhar Diocese dismissed the defamation accusations.

Ucanews.org reported the nun, based in Kerala state in southern India, wrote to the National Human Rights Commission Oct. 19 seeking action against Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar for allegedly tarnishing her image.

"I have been subjected to extreme humiliation and intimidation in various forms" since the crime was reported to police in June 2018, the letter said.

It said church authorities and church social media forums had spread rumors about her and the nuns supporting her.

False statements and fabricated stories aiming to tarnish their reputation and character were spread through social media channels, particularly internet channel Christian Times, the letter said.

"We believe Bishop Franco and his group are behind this agenda," it added.

The nun's letter said her companions, who witnessed the torture and humiliation she suffered, have also been put through humiliations.

The nun – a former superior general of Missionaries of Jesus, a diocesan congregation under the bishop's patronage – accused the bishop of raping her multiple times during visits to Kerala, beginning in 2014.

Mulakkal has denied the rape allegations. The Vatican removed him from diocesan administrative duties, but he retained his title as its bishop.

The bishop was arrested Sept. 21, 2018, after a two-week protest led by five nuns of the same congregation as the alleged rape victim. In April, police charged him with raping a nun multiple times. A 2,000-page charge sheet listed charges of wrongful confinement, rape of a woman incapable of giving consent, causing grievous bodily harm during rape, unnatural offense and criminal intimidation. The court has set

Nov. 11 as the date to start the bishop's trial.

If found guilty, the bishop faces imprisonment of not less than 10 years or up to life in jail.

The alleged victim said she had filed police complaints about eight cases of media humiliation and insults. But even after police began investigating a case against the Christian Times, it published several photographs and videos revealing her name and identity, the nun said.

Indian laws forbid revealing the name, photograph or other details of an alleged rape victim to help protect her from a possible social backlash.

"The identity of witnesses supporting me are also disclosed, leaving them open to intimidation and threats. The videos were published in such a way that my identity was easily recognizable to the public," the letter said.

Mulakkal and his supporters and their media "have been spreading false rumors and fake news" in violation of laws in order to obstruct justice, the nun said.

However, Fr. Peter Kavumpuram, public relations officer of Jalandhar Diocese, dismissed the accusations.

"As far as I know, Christian Times is a private online channel, and Bishop Franco and Jalandhar Diocese have no connection with it," he told ucanews.org.

Several media outlets "targeted the bishop and carried negative stories without checking their facts and figures a year ago. Nobody ever raised any objection then," he said.

The priest said he had seen some news broadcasts by Christian Times.

"I found them accurate and with proper facts and figures. I believe they have sufficient documents to support their claims," he added.

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