

Public statement of the Archbishop of Đakovo-Osijek

With this statement, I hereby apologize to the victims of late Fr Rajčević, to their families, to the parishioners of Sotin parish, especially to those who reported the case, as well as to the entire Croatian public, because despite all the measures I've taken against him at the Government institutions and the Dicastery of the Holy See, I did not remove the suspect priest from the parish during duration of the investigation against him. Unfortunately, listening to the public testimony of one of the victims, as well as the voices of the Church and the general public, and after examination of myself before the crucified Lord, I have just recently realized how big an omission and mistake I made by taking care of the priest, and not realizing the amount of suffering of the victims and their need for protection they asked from me.

With my omissions, as well as with my statements at the press conference that took place on the 21st of March 2023, although I had no such intention in my heart and opinion, I have neglected the condition and suffering of those whom I, as the pastor of the Church, should have protected and keep them safe. I admit it, and with a feeling of deep shame I express my remorse! I am sorry that I did not listen with enough attention and compassion their cry for help, as well as the cries of the families as well as other people who tried to help them in various ways. Although I was with them with my heart, my public statement and actions were absent. I would like to correct this and express my deepest sympathy, in a special way, with the victim who had the courage in recent days to publicly testify to her suffering to her parents, relatives and all others, known and unknown, who suffered any kind of abuse.

I now understand better how important it is to put the victim at the centre of our response to a report of abuse, and that suspects of punishable acts should be dealt with decisively in accordance with current church regulations. I understand that the people who asked for help and protection in this specific case have now lost trust. However, I humbly ask all those who have suffered abuse by Church officials not to be afraid to report the cases to the Archdiocesan Commission for the Protection of Minors, as well as to the police, in order to stop and eradicate this grave evil.

With a humble heart, I invite the priests, religious men and women and all the faithful of our archdiocese to pray together with me and join in acts of penance specifically for the victims of violence committed by the Church officials against minors, young and vulnerable people. Let us pray together in the days of the upcoming Holy Week so that we can open a new page of greater, both personal and common commitment and vigilance in the protection of minors and the vulnerable.

As I repeat my deep apology and regret, I believe that I will manifest with greater clarity the intention and determination of the Church, whose mission is to permanently care for, keep safe and protect lives and dignity of those who are the least and most vulnerable.

Đakovo, 31st March 2023.

✠ Đuro Hranić
Archbishop of Đakovo-Osijek