

Full text: Agnivesh urges Pope Francis to defend nuns who protested against rape-accused bishop

In a letter to the pontiff, the activist said the Catholic Church's decision to issue transfer orders to the five Kerala-based nuns 'reeked of vindictiveness'.

by *Scroll Staff*

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A file photo of social activist Agnivesh. | [Facebook/Swami Agnivesh](#)

Social activist Agnivesh has urged Pope Francis to intervene after five Kerala-based nuns were issued transfer orders by the Catholic Church for leading protests against rape-accused Bishop Franco Mulakkal.

Four of the nuns were asked to [leave](#) their convent in Kuravilangad on January 18. They were [served](#) transfer orders a few days later. The fifth nun, Sister [Neena Rose Edathil](#), was given the order this week, PTI reported on Tuesday.

The nuns have [sought](#) Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's intervention, claiming the orders are part of an attempt to "sabotage the case". One of the nuns has accused the church of attempting to isolate and mentally harass them.

Agnivesh said the transfer orders were prima facie "punitive in nature and uncharitable" and "reeked of vindictiveness". "It is indeed shocking that, while the concerned diocese and its religious orders go easy on the alleged rapist, it is targeting those who stood and struggled for justice for the victim," he wrote in a letter dated January 21.

"The fact that the Roman Catholic Church in India did not respond pro-actively in the matter of the sexual exploitation of a nun has already caused extensive damage to the image of the church in India," Agnivesh wrote. "Now, to make matters

worse, certain functionaries of the church are compounding tolerance towards heinous crimes with intolerance towards commitment to justice.”

The activist urged the pope to defend the nuns. “I have public meetings in Kerala later this month and I hope to be able to visit these nuns in person to be in solidarity with them, as I firmly believe they deserve to be loved and cherished for their passion for justice,” he said.

Here is the full text of the statement:

Dear Fr. Francis,

Greetings from the 1.3 billion people of India.

It is with much expectation and confidence in your robust sense of justice, that I address this letter concerning the harassment to which four sisters of the Missionaries of Jesus order in Kerala are being subjected for the stand they took in solidarity with a fellow nun, who has had to go through harrowing experiences at the hands of a bishop by the name Franco Mulakkal.

In a measure that reeks of vindictiveness, the Mother Superior of the order has issued transfer orders to Sister Alphy Pallasseril, Sister Anupama Kelamangalathuvelyil, Sister Josephine Villoonnickal, and Sister Ancitta Urumbil. This is, prima facie, punitive in nature and uncharitable.

The people of India respect these nuns for the bold stand they took in serving as a voice in the wilderness, crying for justice for the oppressed victim. I am sure you will agree that it is basic to their devotion to Jesus Christ, who came to uphold God’s justice on earth. It is indeed shocking that, while the concerned diocese and its religious orders go easy on the alleged rapist, it is targeting those who stood and struggled for justice for the victim.

The fact that the Roman Catholic Church in India did not respond pro-actively in the matter of the sexual exploitation of a nun has already caused extensive damage to the image of the church in India. Now, to make matters worse, certain functionaries of the church are compounding tolerance towards heinous crimes with intolerance towards commitment to justice. Surely, this cannot be in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I urge you, because of my personal faith in your bold and unapologetic commitment to justice for the oppressed, to intervene in this matter and to defend the sisters from being harassed.

I am deeply disturbed by this turn of events, though I have no direct connection or involvement in the matter. If that is the way I feel from a distance about this issue, I can well imagine how indignant the people of Kerala are feeling about this. Keralites, irrespective of their religious identities, rallied round these nuns and stood in solidarity with them throughout their struggle for justice. There is widespread anger at the injustice being done to them.

I have public meetings in the State Kerala later this month and I hope to be able to visit these nuns in person to be in solidarity with them, as I firmly believe they deserve to be loved and cherished for their passion for justice.

Sincerely,

Swami Agnivesh

President Emeritus - World Council of Arya Samaj.