

Outspoken Zimbabwe Catholic prelate quits amid scandal: Pius Ncube resigns

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A Roman Catholic archbishop who has been a leading critic of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has resigned amid allegations of a sexual affair with a married woman. Though he has previously denied the accusations, Pius Ncube, 60, archbishop of the Bulawayo diocese in Zimbabwe since 1998, said he sent his resignation to Rome to save the church any further attacks.

The Vatican issued a one-sentence statement September 11 that it had accepted Ncube's resignation under a provision of church law that allows bishops to step down in case of illness or other "grave" impediments. Ncube said he submitted his request to resign in July after the accusations became public.

In late August, Zimbabwe's bishops called the accusations "outrageous and utterly deplorable." But after the Vatican announcement, Frederick Chiromba, secretary general of the nation's Catholic Bishops Conference, said, "We can only assume that he felt that those allegations he is facing may compromise his pastoral duties, and probably wanted to give himself time to deal with those issues, outside the church."

However, Ncube, still a bishop, said that he had "not been silenced by the crude machinations of a wicked regime" and would "continue to speak out on the issues that sadly become more acute by the day."

Catholic leaders in Zimbabwe have been among the most vocal critics of the authoritarian Mugabe, who has held power since 1980 and is widely accused of corruption and human rights violations. The bishops issued a pastoral letter in April calling for a new "democratic leadership chosen in free and fair elections."

Ncube himself had emerged as a particularly fierce antagonist of the regime, voicing his willingness to "go in front of blazing guns" to bring it down.

In July, two government-controlled newspapers published what they described as photos of Ncube naked in bed with a married woman. The woman's husband has filed an adultery suit against Ncube, seeking damages. -*Religion News Service, Ecumenical News International*