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In this Aug. 26, 2016 file photo, Gustavo Zanchetta, bishop of Oran, participates in negotiations with border workers, in Oran, Salta, Argentina. An Argentine bishop close to Pope Francis has gone back to work at the Holy See's financial administration office while under investigation in his native Argentina and at the Vatican for alleged sexual abuse. The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, confirmed Archbishop Gustavo Zanchetta had resumed work at the APSA patrimony office but said it in no way interferes with the investigations. He said Zanchetta remains at the disposition of Argentine judicial authorities. (AP/Javier Corbalan)

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Rome — June 15, 2020

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An Argentine bishop close to Pope Francis has gone back to work at the Holy See's financial administration office while under investigation in his native Argentina and at the Vatican for alleged sexual abuse.

The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, confirmed Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta had resumed work at the APSA patrimony office but said it in no way interferes with the investigations. He said Zanchetta remains at the disposition of Argentine judicial

authorities.

The developments came as Francis on June 15 named a new No. 2 at the office, an Italian layman and auditor, Fabio Gasperini.

The Vatican in January 2019 said Zanchetta would abstain from his job as APSA's "assessor," the No. 3 position, pending the outcome of a preliminary investigation into the allegations.

Zanchetta has been formally accused in Argentina of "aggravated continuous sexual abuse" of two seminarians in Oran, about 1,600 kilometers northwest of Buenos Aires, starting in 2016. He has denied the charges.

He is also facing a canonical investigation at the Vatican. While such probes usually wait for the outcome of any secular investigation, Zanchetta's lawyer, Javier Belda, told The Associated Press that the Vatican's investigation into Zanchetta was "nearly finished."

In an email, Belda said the investigation actually wrapped up in December, but was then delayed and complicated by the coronavirus outbreak, which shut down the Vatican for nearly three months. He said he and Zanchetta are "confident about the outcome of the procedures in both fora."

"We are fully convinced that this long judicial process will serve to rehabilitate the name of Monsignor Zanchetta and reinforce justice, because while it's right to protect victims it's also right to absolve those who have been falsely accused," he said.

Francis accepted Zanchetta's resignation in August 2017 after priests in Oran complained about what they said was his authoritarian rule. In addition, a former vicar, a seminary rector and another prelate provided reports to the Vatican alleging abuses of power, inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment of adult seminarians.

Francis created a new job for Zanchetta at APSA later that year. After the scandal erupted, the Vatican said in early 2019 that Zanchetta was only facing "governance" problems at the time of his abrupt 2017 resignation and appointment at the Vatican, and that the first sexual abuse allegation was only made in late 2018.

Testimony from Oran priests and documents obtained by the local Tribune of Salta newspaper, however, suggest that the Vatican was aware of allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior by Zanchetta two years before he resigned.

The Zanchetta case was particularly grave for Francis, given it erupted at the same time that the Argentine pope was defending a Chilean bishop accused of covering up for the country's most notorious abuser.

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