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# Questions and Answers About a Legal Investigation in Argentina

This document briefly presents the evolution of a complaint that a group of women has been making against Opus Dei in Argentina.

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Since September 2020, various criticisms have been publicly leveled against Opus Dei in Argentina. The controversy began in the media but

has changed over time. First there were claims about employment, then there was a claim for damages, and finally allegations of labor exploitation were made. Since June 2023 a legal investigation has been underway, based on the allegation that a group of women were victims of human trafficking and labor exploitation. The Prelature of Opus Dei categorically denies this allegation. This allegation abuses the legal category of a criminal offense that actually has no connection with the facts described by the complainants themselves, much less with the reality of Opus Dei.

## **1. How did it all start?**

In September 2020, a lawyer approached the Prelature claiming to represent forty-three women who had been assistant numeraries of Opus Dei, and seeking the regularization of social security

contributions made on their behalf, that is, the contributions to the country's social security system for retirement pensions and other social benefits. The authorities of the Prelature listened to him, but the limited information he provided was insufficient to analyze the particular social security situation of each of the women.

Since then, new questions have been raised about Opus Dei through various media outlets. These questions have distorted reality and confused the different levels of the complaint (social security contributions, employment issues, criminal activity).

Given the absence of formal submissions by the lawyer and his clients to the courts which would specify the women's complaints, in 2022 the authorities of the Prelature in Argentina created a Listening

Commission to hear directly from those involved and so to better understand the facts and the context in which these facts took place. This would enable the Prelature to offer appropriate responses to these women. As a result of this process, at the end of 2022, a permanent Healing and Resolution Office was established to channel the personalized resolution of possible claims and promote healing processes.

## **2. What is the current status of the case?**

In September 2022, the plaintiff's lawyer filed a complaint with the Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons (Protex), based on press reports about some women who had been members of Opus Dei. In June 2023 prosecutors from Protex filed a formal complaint in the criminal

courts. The federal judge who received the complaint delegated the investigation to the relevant prosecutor's office. In August 2024, after some investigation, the prosecutor's office presented the results of its investigation to the judge. These results were published in the press in September of that year.

In 2024, the prosecutors requested that the judge summon several authorities of the Prelature (specifically, four priests who had been Vicars of Opus Dei in Argentina over a period of three decades) to give preliminary statements, arguing that they would be responsible for the alleged acts under consideration because of the positions they held. So far, the judge has not summoned them.

In 2025, the prosecutors extended their request to include another

former Regional Vicar, Monsignor Mariano Fazio, who currently resides in Rome and is the Auxiliary Vicar of the Prelature. Recently, the plaintiff's lawyer has stated in the media that he has asked the prosecution to also include Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Prelate of Opus Dei, who resides in Rome.

At this time, therefore, the judge has not yet charged anyone with any crime. What exists is a request from the prosecutors for the judge handling the case to summon certain individuals to hear their version of the facts. However, the judge has not yet decided whether or not to grant that request, nor has he decided whom he might summon.

In relation to this legal investigation, we reiterate that we categorically deny the accusation of human trafficking and labor exploitation against members of the Prelature.

Although we would have preferred not to have reached this stage, we feel obliged to warn of this serious abuse of the legal system for media purposes. Totally unfounded accusations are being made to exert pressure in an employment-monetary claim. At the same time, we maintain our commitment to listen to all those who have a complaint about their experience in Opus Dei and to cooperate with the legal system in every way possible.

### **3. Who are the assistant numeraries?**

Assistant numeraries are members of Opus Dei, which is an institution of the Catholic Church. Like all other members, they join Opus Dei in response to a vocational call to find God and make him present in their daily environment, especially through their work and through

their family, social, and friendship relationships.

In the case of assistant numeraries, their professional work (which, like any other, requires specialized skills, a development plan, and ongoing training) consists of caring for the people and centers of Opus Dei. In effect, they create a home, providing a material and spiritual environment that helps the persons who live there to be formed and to flourish.

Like all members of Opus Dei, they also have their friendships, hobbies, family relationships, and they participate fully in the evangelizing mission of the Prelature, collaborating with various formative and apostolic initiatives.

This path has been chosen by many women around the world. It requires the full exercise of their freedom within a process of discernment and gradual, voluntary incorporation.



Those who wish to join Opus Dei must express their desire to do so explicitly on multiple occasions, some of which must be in writing. Anyone who joins Opus Dei with a permanent commitment must have reaffirmed his or her desire to be a member at least eight times over a period of at least six and a half years.

Those interested in learning more about the life of an assistant numerary can read testimonials from assistant numeraries from different parts of the world here.

## **4. What are the living conditions of assistant numeraries?**

Assistant numeraries receive remuneration for their professional work, have medical coverage, and access to academic training and professional development. In addition, they have additional

financial means and resources to travel to visit their families or to help their families financially if needed.

Contrary to what has been stated in some media outlets, they live in a well-kept environment with spaces for rest, reading, and personal growth.

Several assistant numeraries in Argentina have expressed their desire to show the houses and rooms where they live: by clicking here you can see photos of some of the houses.

## **5. What is Opus Dei's position on the case?**

From the outset, Opus Dei has sought to establish channels of dialogue, and today it reaffirms its willingness to cooperate with the courts to clarify the facts. At the same time, it **categorically rejects the accusation of trafficking and exploitation** and

maintains that the complaint is based on a misrepresentation of the vocation freely chosen by the assistant numeraries. It also believes that the application of a criminal charge is an abuse and has no connection with the facts described by the people involved, much less with the reality of Opus Dei.

For this reason, it considers it essential that the people who are being accused of this crime be able to fully exercise their right to defense and present their version of the facts for the first time. This would greatly help to clarify the situation.

This step is especially important in light of ongoing systematic attempts in the news media to establish a narrative of automatic guilt, without respecting due process or the presumption of innocence. Facts are being distorted in an attempt to bring forward an accusation of a

crime that has nothing to do with reality. This procedure has been demonstrated once again by the plaintiff's lawyer's recent proposal to involve the Prelate in the investigation, a step that has no factual or legal basis. Opus Dei draws attention to this serious abuse of the legal system through the news media, which is being done to exert pressure in an employment-monetary dispute.

## **6. How does the Argentine criminal justice system work in a case like this? At what stage is the judicial process?**

For those unfamiliar with the workings of the criminal justice system in Argentina, a brief explanation may be useful for understanding the current state of affairs and avoiding precipitous

conclusions on such a sensitive and complex issue.

In general terms, a criminal case in Argentina goes through two main stages. The first is the investigation, conducted by a prosecutor or a judge. The second is the oral trial, which is heard by a court composed of three judges. This second stage only begins if it is considered that there are procedural grounds to move forward to it.

At this moment, the case involving the Prelature is in the first stage. The first stage aims to gather evidence to determine whether or not a crime was committed and, if so, to develop a hypothesis about who might be responsible; it can last several months or even years. This stage is generally conducted by prosecutors, as occurred at the beginning of this investigation. Subsequently, however, the judge deemed it

necessary to take it up himself. He is now leading the investigation, evaluating the evidence gathered, ensuring procedural guarantees, and will ultimately decide whether the case should be closed or should move on to the second stage.

After the initial investigation, the judge must decide what to do next. He can:

1. Dismiss the case if there's no evidence of a crime or that the person committed it.
2. Order that the investigation continue if there isn't enough evidence yet to move forward.
3. Formally charge the person if there is enough evidence, starting a trial before a court, governed by the presumption of innocence and procedural guarantees. After this trial of the first instance, the system allows for appeals.

In this specific case, the judge has not yet made any decision about whether to summon anyone for questioning, nor has he decided who to summon.

For these reasons, it is important to bear in mind that in Argentina the opening of a criminal investigation—including statements from anyone the judge deems necessary—does not automatically lead to a trial. In many cases, the case is closed before reaching that stage, either because the judge considers that no crime was committed (dismissal) or because he considers that the evidence is insufficient (lack of merit). For those accustomed to the U.S. legal system, what has happened so far is analogous to an investigation without any indictments; no one has been charged with a crime.

Human trafficking is a very serious crime that directly attacks the dignity

of individuals and the Prelature has categorically denied this accusation from the outset. Furthermore, the Prelature considers it particularly serious that attempts are being made to force the application of such a serious criminal offense when the facts described by the complainant bear no relation to it. Such maneuvers not only undermine the function of justice, but also trivialize truly painful situations that affect thousands of real victims around the world.

In summary, currently:

- The criminal case is only in the investigation stage.
- No individuals have been called to give preliminary testimony.
- The judge in the case has not ordered the indictment of any (potential) defendants.



- No public trial is underway.
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## Brief timeline

- **September 2020:** The women's lawyer makes a claim for missing social security contributions on behalf of 43 women who were members of the Prelature. He refuses to provide individualized information that would allow the particular situation of each of them to be known and then addressed.
- **April 2021:** The case is brought to the media, adding new criticisms, some of which are false and taken out of context.
- **November 2021:** The Regional Vicar meets with the lawyer representing the women, with

an open and listening attitude, in order to open channels of dialogue. However, the lawyer again refuses to provide information on each individual case, making it impossible to give an adequate response to each woman.

- Institutional statement

- **June 2022:** A Listening and Study Commission is created in response to the lack of legal filings by the alleged victims and the frustration with possible dialogue through the women's lawyer.

- Institutional statement

- **September 2022:** Numerous assistant numeraries from around the world publish an open letter asking for respect for their vocation.

· See letter

- **December 2022:** The Office of Healing and Resolution is created. Based on the healing experience of the listening process for those who have come forward, the Regional Vicar decides to establish a permanent commission open to people who belonged to Opus Dei and wish to come forward to resolve a specific issue or discuss their experiences in the institution. Through these initiatives, it has been possible to resolve the complaints of some women who are no longer part of the group. Some of them have stated that they only wanted to resolve a pension issue and that, without their consent, they have been used to

make serious accusations that they do not agree with.

- **March 2024:** A protocol for dealing with institutional complaints is established for all countries where Opus Dei is present, including the creation of Healing and Resolution Offices in those regions where it is deemed appropriate. Such offices have been set up in several countries, for example, in Spain.
- **September 2024:** Following the presentation of the prosecutor's opinion to the judge, the information was published in the press and the prosecutor's office stated in its institutional newsletter that it had conducted an investigation and referred it to the appropriate judge. It became clear that the complaint, which had been

initiated due to inconsistencies in social security contributions and employment issues that could eventually lead to a claim for damages, had strangely turned into a criminal investigation for “human trafficking” and “labor exploitation.” Opus Dei categorically rejected these new allegations. At the same time, it maintained its willingness to cooperate with the legal system and to listen with empathy and an open mind to anyone who comes forward with a complaint or to share a negative experience.

- Institutional statement

- **July 2025:** The prosecutor's office reiterates its August 2024 request and asks that Monsignor Mariano Fazio, former Regional Vicar of

Argentina, current auxiliary vicar of the Prelature, and resident in Rome, also be called to give a preliminary statement. Days later, the plaintiff's lawyer reports in a radio interview that he has also requested the inclusion of Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, Prelate of Opus Dei, in the investigation. Opus Dei is forced to point out that, through maneuvers lacking any factual or legal basis, there is a serious abuse of the legal system for media purposes, in order to exert pressure in an employment-monetary dispute.

- Official statement.

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- For more background information on this conflict, please [click here](#).
  - [This link](#) provides more information about the life of assistant numeraries.
  - [Here you can read the life stories of assistant numeraries](#) who explain the nature of their vocational choice and what it entails. Here are [the stories of Mariana, Luli, and Kele](#), assistant numeraries in Argentina.
  - At [this link](#), you can see more testimonies about the vocation in Opus Dei.

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