

Newspapers say pope may apologize to Australian clergy abuse victims

SYDNEY, Australia – While in Sydney for World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI may apologize to victims of clerical sexual abuse, according to Sydney's largest circulation newspapers.

"The pope is set to make an historic apology when he visits Sydney in July – to the tens of thousands of Australians sexually and physically abused by predatory Catholic priests," reported The Daily Telegraph May 8.

The Sydney Morning Herald quoted Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, retired auxiliary bishop of Sydney and former head of the church's abuse panel, as saying he hopes "the Australian bishops will quietly ask the pope to say something on the issue of abuse when he comes to Sydney."

"It was young people who were abused so it's not irrelevant to World Youth Day. From what I hear, the things the pope said in the United States and especially his meeting with victims did help," said Bishop Robinson.

For seven years, Bishop Robinson was the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference representative on the National Committee for Professional Standards, established by the Australian bishops and leaders of religious orders in 1996 in response to victims' claims of sexual and physical abuse by priests and religious.

After dealing with more than 1,000 victim's statements, Bishop Robinson retired in 2003 and wrote a book, "Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church," published last year.

In the book, he criticized Pope John Paul II's attitude to the abuse allegations first aired in the 1980s and said that he was "convinced that if the pope had spoken clearly at the beginning of the revelations ... the entire response of the church would have been far better."

Bishop Michael Malone of Maitland-Newcastle reportedly brought up the papal

apology at a recently concluded bishops' plenary.

Bishop Malone has apologized personally to sex abuse victims in his diocese, which now provides a range of ongoing support services to victims. The diocese was the scene of three high-profile priestly pedophilia cases that cost the church approximately \$6 million in compensation payments to victims for breach of the church's duty of care toward children.

Pope Benedict will depart Rome for Australia July 12 and return July 21. He is scheduled to participate in a welcoming ceremony in Sydney July 17 and other World Youth Day events July 18-20.