

Polish prelate denies allegations

WARSAW, Poland - The Polish archbishop who resigned after admitting he collaborated with his country's communist secret police denied claims that he failed to inform the pope about his past.

Meanwhile, another archbishop has rejected accusations that he also acted as an informer and published an explanation of his secret police contacts.

Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus, who resigned in early January after serving for just two days as archbishop of Warsaw, told the Polish Catholic information agency, KAI, "In connection with media accusations that I gave the apostolic nuncio in Poland a false testimony about my contacts with the special services, I submit a copy of this testimony, whose contents I fully uphold.

"I swear by God in the Holy Trinity that, during the meetings and talks I held with police and intelligence representatives in connection with my trips abroad in the 1970s, I never acted against the church and never did or said anything bad against members of the clergy or laity," he told KAI in an interview published Jan. 13.

In an interview published the previous day, Archbishop Jozef Kowalczyk, apostolic nuncio, said Archbishop Wielgus failed to "give a full picture" of his links with the secret police - the Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa or SB - before Pope Benedict XVI named him archbishop of Warsaw Dec. 2.

In a Jan. 12 KAI interview, Archbishop Kowalczyk said he had received no information about Archbishop Wielgus' secret police contacts from the Catholic University of Lublin, where he served as rector 1989-98, or from the Diocese of Plock, where he was serving at the time he was named to Warsaw.

He added that Archbishop Wielgus had "fully maintained his previous testimony" and "assured the Holy See there was no collaboration" when a Polish weekly, Gazeta Polska, accused him of being an informer Dec. 20.

"I summoned Archbishop Wielgus and asked him directly how this matter looked with him. He wrote a detailed explanation, which was immediately dispatched to the

Holy See," the nuncio said.

"But he did not say a single word about the fact of his collaboration. All his testimony was submitted under oath, so it was difficult to question it. ... In this way, the Holy See was informed of everything Archbishop Wielgus said about his work and contacts with the SB. From the knowledge passed on by the bishop, there had been no collaboration."

Archbishop Wielgus announced his resignation Jan. 7 after confirming in a Jan. 5 statement he had signed pledges to inform for the secret police.

Several Polish church leaders criticized media pressure on Archbishop Wielgus, and Polish Cardinal Jozef Glemp, who will continue to administer the Warsaw Archdiocese until a replacement can be found, urged him to take legal action to clear his name.

Meanwhile, at an emergency meeting in Warsaw Jan. 12, the bishops' conference said Poland's 44 dioceses would be encouraged to begin checking the background of local priests, while a church historical commission, appointed in November, would if requested study the files kept on bishops, leaving a final decision on those most "burdened by collaboration" to the Vatican. The conference added that a team of legal experts would be appointed in March to assist the commission.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, told Vatican Radio Jan. 13 he was pleased with the bishops' decisions.

"Communication is essential," he said. "A lack of communication in any field is dangerous, deadly, and is an obstacle to make mature, well-founded decisions and for carrying out a discernment especially on the authenticity or falseness of documents."

Cardinal Bertone said that such a discernment is essential in the case of any one accused of collaborating with a totalitarian regime because there is a serious possibility that the documents contain false information.

The cardinal also told Vatican Radio, "I am praying, I am reflecting with the Holy Father" and consulting with church officials about who will be named archbishop of

Warsaw, but he said he could not guess when a nomination would be announced.

Church sources said further media allegations were likely after Poland's Dziennik daily published the code names of 12 bishops it said were informers in 1978, the year of Pope John Paul II's election.

In Lublin, Archbishop Jozef Zycinski denied he had used the code name "Filozof" while working in Krakow and said he had never "undertaken any action that could be described as SB collaboration."

In an article in the Catholic Tygodnik Powszechny weekly, Archbishop Zycinski said he asked Poland's official National Remembrance Institute to investigate claims against him last June, adding that he had now made a similar request with the church historical commission.

The archbishop said he had been approached by the secret police as a parish pastor in 1974 and later while sending Polish students to study at The Catholic University of America in Washington with funding from the U.S. government. However, he added that he had never received propositions of collaboration from secret police agents.

"It is an extremely difficult task today to sort out the principles of rationality and sense we followed at that time," Archbishop Zycinski said in his article. "Those who tried years ago to overcome the absurdities of systemic inertia are now having to explain why they didn't behave then in accordance with what the radical publicists are advising today."

Contributing to this story was Cindy Wooden at the Vatican.