

Vatican opposes Iran stoning, but works diplomatically, priest says

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican opposes the stoning of an Iranian woman convicted of adultery, but it does not intervene publicly in other nations' "humanitarian" affairs, said the Vatican's spokesman.

Instead, it addresses such issues behind-the-scenes through its own diplomatic channels, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi said in a statement Sept. 5.

Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani was convicted of adultery by an Iranian court in 2006 and sentenced to be stoned to death. She retracted her confession, saying it was made under duress. She earlier had been sentenced to 99 lashes for an "illicit relationship" with two men.

Father Lombardi said that the Vatican is following Ashtiani's case "with attention."

The Catholic Church is against the death penalty, he said, "and stoning is a particularly brutal form" of capital punishment.

He said when people request that the Vatican contact authorities of other countries to intervene concerning particular "humanitarian issues," the Vatican normally "does so not in a public manner, but through its own diplomatic channels."