

Mexico City mayor sues Catholic prelate

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Marcelo Ebrard, mayor of Mexico City, has filed a defamation lawsuit against Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, archbishop of Guadalajara, for his claim that Ebrard bribed the country's Supreme Court into backing a gay marriage law approved by Mexico City's legislative assembly last December.

Mexico's federal government, currently headed by the conservative PAN Party, had challenged the law, arguing that it was detrimental to children. But in three consecutive decisions the court found the law to be constitutional, upheld its gay adoption provision and ruled that all of the country's 31 states must recognize gay marriages performed in the capital.

In an August 15 press conference at which he referred to gay men as "faggots," Cardinal Sandoval said that the judges would not have "come to these absurd conclusions" had they not been paid off with "gifts" from "Ebrard and international organizations."

When Sandoval refused to apologize, make a retraction or support his accusation with evidence, Mayor Ebrard filed suit, saying: "They should present proof, which we know they don't have. . . . We live in a secular state, and here, whether we like it or not, the law rules the land. The cardinal must submit to [that law], like all other citizens of this country." Ebrard said he filed the suit to defend both his honor and the principle of separation of church and state.

In a unanimous vote of censure, the Supreme Court denied and condemned Cardinal Sandoval's accusation. The Bishops' Conference of Mexico, however, expressed solidarity with Sandoval. When asked if he had proof to support his allegation of bribery, the cardinal said simply: "Check their bank accounts." But Archbishop Antonio Gutiérrez, speaking on Sandoval's behalf, said the cardinal does have "something specific" to support his charge and would be willing to present it in court.

Hugo Valdemar, a spokesman for the Archdiocese of Mexico City, has urged Catholics to vote against Mayor Ebrard's PRD Party in the next election, saying that the laws created by the mayor and his government "do more damage than drug traffickers." Valdemar acknowledges that Section 130 of Mexico's constitution bars clergy from attacking political candidates or parties, but he favors revision of that section, arguing that it infringes on church leaders' freedom of expression.