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Russian Orthodox Church Defends Suspects Embroiled in Argentinian Cocaine Scandal

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Hieromonk Gerasim **Vkontakte**

The Russian Orthodox Church in Argentina has come to the defense of an arrested cop in a massive drug bust at the Russian Embassy in Buenos Aires.

Russia and Argentina launched a joint operation after Moscow's envoy alerted local authorities of finding 16 suitcases of cocaine hidden at the embassy school grounds in late 2016. Law enforcement officials said six people were arrested in a drug bust as part of the investigation last week, including an Argentine police officer of Russian descent named Ivan Bliznyuk.

Related article: Russian Embassy in Argentina Caught Up in Cocaine Smuggling Probe

The Russian Orthodox Church in the Argentinean port city of Mar del Plata said that Bliznyuk

was a philanthropist who regularly donated to church causes and called him a victim of "provocation and real slander."

"Many people were jealous of him inside the Russian Embassy in Argentina," church rector Hieromonk Gerasim told the newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta on Wednesday.

"We will pray that the truth triumphs while the real intruders will be punished in all severity of the law," Gerasim was cited as saying.

The Russian Consulate in Mar del Plata named Bliznyuk as the vice-president of the Russian Orthodox Patrons in Latin America, abbreviated in Spanish as MORAL.

Argentina has accused Bliznyuk of providing contacts to the drug-runners to bypass customs controls, the Guardian reported.

The president of MORAL, Alexander Chikalo, has been arrested on suspicion of running the logistics that allowed the cocaine to be delivered aboard a diplomatic plane to Moscow.

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