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**Vatican Cardinal on new line because of petition on
“pretext”**

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Photo above: March 4, 2013, Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea walks in St. Peter's Square after attending a Vatican meeting.

"Latest articles to consider: The response of this socially conservative papal schism to the coronavirus and President Trump."

Élder Tess

Nicole Winfield

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ROME - A petition signed by some conservative Catholics claiming that the coronavirus is an exaggerated "pretext" to deprive the faithful of the Mass and impose a new world order was a bit complicated.

The highest ranking signatory, Cardinal Robert Sarah, head of the Vatican liturgical office, claims he never signed the petition. But the archbishop who led the operation said Friday that Sarah was totally on board, and he has the recorded phone conversations to prove it.

So Sarah, the Ghanaian-born heroine for conservative Catholics, landed on another controversy he said he said, after the polemics of a book he wrote with retired Pope Benedict XVI about priestly celibacy that caused a huge firestorm earlier this year.

The petition against the virus, signed mainly by Italian clerics, academics and journalists, is the latest initiative by conservative believers of various religions to frame the blockades of COVID-19 as an attack on religious freedom, a threat to the global economy and a conspiracy to separate families.

It was released Thursday, the same day that the conference of the government and bishops of Italy reached an agreement to

resume Masses from 18 May, with rigorous security protocols after a two-month lockdown.

The petition says the emergence of the virus is a "pretext" for nameless actors to manipulate and control people through panic and deprive them of their fundamental freedoms, including freedom of worship. It warns that measures to impose contact tracing devices, demand vaccines and "criminalize" contact between grandparents and grandchildren is "a disturbing prelude to achieving a world government beyond any control.

It is the latest manifesto of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the former Holy See diplomat who achieved notoriety with his j'accuse 2018 of a high-level Vatican cover-up of sexual abuse and has come to opine - negatively - on everything from the Vatican's policy in China to the disclosure of Pope Francis to Muslims and his synod in the Amazon.

In addition to Sarah and Vigano, the main signatories include three other conservative cardinals who criticized Francis' papacy, including the deposed prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, and the retired Archbishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen.

It is the most recent fire storm that has at its center both Sarah and Vigano, the retired diplomat of the Holy See who threw the Papacy of Francis upside down with his 2018 allegations of a two-decade cover-up by former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

Francis convicted McCarrick after a Vatican investigation found that he sexually abused seminarians and minors. The Vatican has yet to release its promised report on Vigano's allegations.

Meanwhile, Sarah made headlines in January when she released a book with Benedict as co-author, affirming the need to keep the Catholic priesthood celibate. This caused uproar because it implied that the retired pope was trying to influence the

ruler, who at the time was considering whether to allow married priests in the Amazon to alleviate the shortage of priests.

As in the petition about who agreed to what, Benedict's secretary insisted that the retired pope never agreed to be a co-author and asked that his name be removed from future editions of the book as an author.

Seeking to clear his name and show that Benedict was indeed on board, Sarah provided contemporary notes of his relations with the retired pope.

It is a similar tactic to Vigano is now using to show that Sarah was indeed on board the petition against the virus, despite his claims to the contrary.

Sarah tweeted on Thursday that although he may "share some questions or concerns" about the fundamental freedoms raised by the petition, he did not sign it, and should not, given his role as Vatican authority.

In a statement released on Friday, Vigano made it clear that Sarah had indeed agreed, but said she would act "deeply charitably" towards the cardinal and forgive him "for the grave crime he has committed against the truth and me.

He then began to give a chronology of his communications with the Cardinal, saying that it was his duty to issue a "fraternal correction" to clarify things.

He quoted Sarah saying to him on May 4: "I give my consent to put my name, because it is a struggle that we must conduct together, not only for the Catholic Church, but for all humanity.

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/05/vatican-cardinal-in-new-row-over-virus-pretext-petition/>