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Cardinal Angelo Becciu talks to journalists during press conference in Rome, on Sept. 25, 2020. The Vatican prosecutor asked a court Wednesday July 26, 2023 to convict 10 people, including Cardinal Becciu, of a range of financial crimes, sentence them between three to 13 years in prison and order the confiscation of some 415 million euros to pay the Holy See back for bad investments and financial losses over the past decade. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia, File)

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Vatican City — July 26, 2023

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The Vatican prosecutor asked a court July 26 to convict 10 people, including a cardinal, of a range of financial crimes, sentence them to three to 13 years in prison and order the confiscation of some 415 million euros (\$460 million) to pay the Holy See back for bad investments and financial losses over the past decade.

Prosecutor Alessandro Diddi ended six days of aggressive closing arguments with his requests for a verdict and sentencing. After a summer pause, the defense and civil parties in the Vatican's "trial of the century" will deliver their closing arguments, with Judge Giuseppe Pignatone's court expected to deliver a verdict before the end of the year.

Diddi justified the substantial requests for prison time, fines and confiscation of assets based on what he called the "many crimes against the patrimony of the Holy See." He has estimated the combined losses at between 139 million and 189 million euros (\$154 million and \$210 million).

"Up until now, no one has advanced an offer to pay back the damage," he said. "These are people with means."

The sprawling trial originated in the Vatican's 350 million euro (\$385 million) investment in a luxury London property but grew to include two other tangents implicating Cardinal Angelo Becciu, once a papal contender and the first-ever cardinal to stand trial in the Vatican criminal court.

One involved allegations Becciu donated some 125,000 euros (\$138,000) in Vatican money to a Sardinian charity run by his brother; the other involved allegations he used some 575,000 euros (\$635,000) in Vatican funds to double pay a self-styled security analyst ransom fees to help free a nun held hostage by al-Qaida-linked militants in Mali.

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Diddi asked the court to convict Becciu, sentence him to seven years and three months in prison, prevent him from ever holding public office in the Vatican, fine him 10,329 euros (\$11,438) and confiscate 14 million euros (\$15.5 million). He justified seeking the upper end of the Vatican's sentencing guidelines for Becciu because of his "behavior" during the trial. In his closing arguments, Diddi accused Becciu of formulating a "strategy of attacks" against the prosecutors' office.

Unlike most defendants, Becciu has attended nearly every hearing in the two-year trial and made several spontaneous declarations to the court. But he has steadfastly maintained his innocence and issued regular press statements saying so after most hearings.

He and the other nine defendants on trial have strongly maintained their innocence and accused the prosecutors of depriving them of basic rights afforded to the defense in other countries.

After the hearing, Becciu's lawyers, Maria Concetta Marzo and Fabio Viglione, repeated that Becciu should be found innocent and said he had always acted as a "loyal servant of the church."

"Not even one day would be a fair sentence," they said in a statement.

The request for some 415 million euros in assets to be ordered confiscated from the defendants, plus another 1.5 million euros (\$1.6 million) from four of their companies, was not based on the defendants' known assets, though some bank accounts have been frozen. Rather they were based on Diddi's quantification of the damage done to the Holy See by each alleged crime.