

PRESS RELEASE

UN Committee Against Torture criticises Holy See over child sexual abuse

The UN has condemned the Holy See's failure to prevent torture or ill-treatment committed by Catholic clergy worldwide, and called for the Holy See to ensure redress for victims of sexual abuse.

Geneva (Switzerland), 23 May 2014.

The UN Committee Against Torture has criticised the Holy See's failure to prevent, stop, sanction and provide redress for child sexual abuse committed by Catholic Church officials worldwide. The Holy See must "take steps to ensure that victims of sexual abuse committed by or with the acquiescence of the State party's officials receive redress, including fair, adequate and enforceable right to compensation and as full rehabilitation as possible, regardless of whether perpetrators of such acts have been brought to justice", says the Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) in a [report of concluding observations](#), which was released today following the Committee's review of the State earlier this month.

CRIN and OMCT welcome UNCAT's report on the Holy See, which almost entirely focuses on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. In the report the Committee rejects the Holy See's claim that it is not responsible for abuses committed outside the Vatican City State, reminding the Holy See that its obligations under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) extend to Holy See officials worldwide, "wherever they exercise effective control over persons or territory".

The Committee highlights the Holy See's failure to provide specific information on its handling of cases of child sexual abuse, and expresses concern over reports that Holy See officials resist the principle of mandatory reporting of abuse allegations to civil authorities and have declined to provide information to civil authorities. The Committee also expresses concern over numerous reports of cases in which clergy accused or convicted of such offences were transferred to other dioceses where they remained in contact with children and in some cases continued to abuse children. Furthermore, the Committee expresses deep concern at the inability of many victims to obtain redress for abuse perpetrated by or with the acquiescence of Holy See officials.

In a long list of recommendations, the Committee calls on Holy See officials to:

- ensure effective monitoring of the conduct of all individuals under their effective control, and immediately suspend individuals suspected of abuse and prevent their transfer;

- report allegations of abuse to civil authorities and cooperate with their investigation and prosecution;
- apply meaningful sanctions to those who fail to exercise due diligence and react properly to such allegations;
- establish an independent complaints mechanism for victims; and
- ensure that victims of sexual abuse committed by or with the acquiescence of Holy See officials receive redress, including fair, adequate and enforceable right to compensation and as full rehabilitation as possible.

During its review by UNCAT, the Holy See delegation indicated that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had dealt with 3420 credible allegations of sexual abuse by priests between 2004-2013, resulting in the defrocking of 848 priests and disciplining of 2572 others. However, the Holy See failed to provide requested data on the number of cases in which it provided information to civil authorities in the places where the cases arose and in the places where the priests concerned are currently located.

In its [response](#) to the concluding observations, the Holy See rejects UNCAT's implied assumption that any sexual abuse amounts to torture under CAT as "fundamentally flawed, misleading, and ultimately counter-productive".

Child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church was included in UNCAT's review because of the [efforts of NGOs](#), including Child Rights International Network (CRIN) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), [who submitted evidence to the UN](#). In their joint [submission](#) to the Committee, CRIN and OMCT emphasise that, by acquiescing to rape and other forms of sexual abuse committed worldwide by Catholic clergy and others operating under the Holy See's authority, the Holy See has failed its duties to prevent torture and other acts of ill-treatment within its jurisdiction, thereby violating CAT.

UNCAT's criticism of the Holy See follows the State's historic review [earlier this year](#) by another UN human rights body, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, where the Holy See was rebuked for having "consistently placed the preservation of the reputation of the Church and the protection of the perpetrators above children's best interests."

The Holy See's review by UNCAT was part of the Committee's 52nd session, in which Cyprus, Guinea, Lithuania, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uruguay were also scrutinised for their adherence to CAT.

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Further information:

- [UNCAT's concluding observations on the Holy See](#).
- "[Unofficial minutes](#)" taken by CRIN and OMCT of UNCAT's review of the Holy See.
- [Alternative report](#) submitted by OMCT and CRIN to UNCAT for the Holy See's review.

- CRIN's report mapping the global scale of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church: "[Child sexual abuse and the Holy See: the need for justice, accountability and reform](#)".
- CRIN's campaign: [End sexual violence in religious institutions](#).
- [#VaticanAccountability](#) on Twitter.

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Notes to editors

The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) is today the main coalition of NGOs fighting against torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances and all other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. With 311 affiliated organisations in its SOS-Torture Network and many tens of thousands correspondents in every country, OMCT is the most important network of non-governmental organisations working for the protection and the promotion of human rights in the world.

Child Rights International Network (CRIN) is a global research, policy and advocacy organisation. Our work is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our goal is a world where children's rights are recognised, respected and enforced, and where every rights violation has a remedy. Our work is based on five core values:

- We believe in rights, not charity
- We are stronger when we work together
- Information is power and it should be free and accessible
- Societies, organisations and institutions should be open, transparent and accountable
- We believe in promoting children's rights, not ourselves.