

# Final survivor resigns from Pope's commission on clerical abuse of minors

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The last remaining survivor of clerical abuse on the Pontifical Commission for Protection of Minors, Marie Collins, has resigned from it "to maintain [her] integrity".

She said in a statement "I find it impossible to listen to public statements about the deep concern in the Church for the care of those whose lives have been blighted by abuse, yet to watch privately as a congregation in the Vatican refuses to even acknowledge their letters!"

The 17-member Commission was set up by the Pope to make proposals to "repair the damage, to attain justice, and to prevent, by all means possible, the recurrence of similar incidents in the future".

Ms Collins, who is Irish, complained that the Commission is deprived of adequate resources and of the "reluctance of some members of the Vatican Curia" to implement "one of the simplest recommendations of the Commission" despite approval by the Pope".

Collins described that as the "last straw".

She considers "it is devastating in 2017 to see that these men still can put other concerns before the safety of children and vulnerable adults".

She said she would have raised such matters with the Pope, but had never had the opportunity to meet him in her three years with the Commission. Despite not having the chance to meet him she says that she still believes "he understand[s] the horror of abuse and the need for those who would hurt minors to be stopped".

Nevertheless, she set out a catalogue of his failed or impotent initiatives, including those to make responsible senior clerics accountable, and noted her disappointment over the reduction of punishments against abusive priests that Francis had allowed in some cases.

The other survivor, Peter Saunders, founder of the (British) National Association for People Abused in Childhood, has not received any communication from the Commission, including notification of meetings since drawing the media's attention a year ago to the Commission's failure to deliver on its promises of reform and accountability.

Keith Porteous Wood, executive Director of the National Secular Society commented: "Marie Collins' principled resignation, and the reasons she set out for it, destroys the little remaining credibility of the Commission's wish, far less resolve, to recommend effective measures to force the Church to bring perpetrators to account in secular courts. Taken in conjunction with the mounting criticisms of the Pope's softening resolve in this area, it is now clear that, in respect of clerical child abuse, the Church and the Vatican are both unwilling to and incapable of following international norms of justice and human rights. It is not inconceivable that the International Criminal Court may need to become involved.

"Every country should ensure that their laws require that, firstly, the failure to report to the police or other secular regulators reasonable suspicions of abuse of minors in institutional settings constitutes a criminal offence and, secondly, that any statutes of limitations do not apply to cases involving abuse of minors, where it often takes several decades for victims to summon the courage to report the abuse to which they have been subjected."

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