

New call for mandatory reporting after Catholic Church in Australia admits “devastating” scale of child abuse

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Five secularist organisations, including the NSS, have called for the Catholic Church to take real action to ensure justice for victims of clerical child abuse.

They signed an [open letter](#) to Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council of the Australian Catholic Church, which coordinates the Church's response to the Australian Royal Commission on institutional child abuse.

In a devastating [speech](#) in March, Sullivan said there was a "moral disease" that is "ingrained, almost cemented, within the culture of the Church."

He pointed to figures showing that 8% of diocesan priests in Australia faced allegations of abuse.

Sullivan described the percentages in some religious orders as "gob-smacking".

"In the St John of God brothers, well over a third of the order in early times had abuse allegations made against them.

"Twenty two per cent of Christian Brothers had allegations made against them and the Marists were not far behind."

He said the Church "has to acknowledge that abuse occurred within its ranks and that it exercised a systemic cover up".

The secularist groups wrote to Sullivan that his speech was "admirably frank" about the abuse crisis, but that they were "surprised" that he had initially believed the Church only had "up to 100 paedophiles in its history".

The letter said there was "plenty of evidence of the abuse."

"It seems extraordinary that you seem unaware of the implication of the thousands of press reports of such abuse from around the world over decades and the billions of dollars that have been paid out in damages in the US, and millions of Euros in Ireland."

Actions taken by the Pope were "pain-free" for perpetrators. The Pontifical Commission "never had any executive power", and the tribunal announced by the Pope was abandoned and never sat, the letter said.

The signatories made four recommendations.

Reporting of institutional abuse should be mandatory, and statutes of limitations should be lifted for child abuse cases. The Royal Commission found that reporting of cases took an average of 30

years.

The letter also said that no religious organisation should be immune to being sued, and that there should be one law for all "with no recognition of parallel legal systems."

"Religious institutions should not be permitted to exempt themselves from the law of the land; Canon law must not take precedence over Australian law."

The signatories, besides the National Secular Society, were the Rationalist Society of Australia, the Rationalist Association of New South Wales, Plain Reason, and the Humanist Society of Queensland.

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