

Catholic Church criticised at UN Human Rights Council over continued failure to address child sex abuse

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The Catholic Church has been strongly criticised at the UN Human Rights Council for obstructing disclosure of child abuse and payment of victims' compensation.

In an [oral statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council 30th Session in Geneva, the European Humanist Federation rebuked the Holy See for its continued failure to accept the [criticisms](#) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child over child abuse.

The UN Human Rights Council was urged to press the Vatican on clerical child abuse and to ensure that justice is done for the victims.

An accompanying [written statement](#), prepared with the assistance of the National Secular Society, accused the Vatican of continuing to "fiercely" obstruct the disclosure of information related to perpetrators of abuse, while dragging out the payment of compensation to victims.

The statement called on the Human Rights Council to press the Holy See to make all information about child abuse perpetrators available to local law enforcement, and urged the Human Rights Council to "instruct the Church worldwide, and its lawyers and insurers, to fairly and expeditiously settle claims and cases against the Church, including for compensation".

Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, said: "The Vatican has largely ignored the [67 concluding observations](#) of the UN Committee on the Child to disclose information and report suspected abusers. Instead the Vatican criticised the Committee of experts and set up a powerless Commission on child abuse that has neither authority nor responsibility.

"Similarly, the Tribunal to oversee bishops' actions over child abuse, cynically created in the wake of convictions of bishops for complicity over child abuse, gives the appearance of being a legitimate alternative channel for dealing with reprobate bishops. Whatever the intention it prevented bishops being reported to relevant law enforcement authorities for investigation and prosecution.

"Both Commission and Tribunal have been a publicity triumph but have compounded the Church's abuse of victims."

Meanwhile, in a separate intervention, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) has told the UN that secularism is essential for the genuine promotion of human rights around the world.

Elizabeth O'Casey, head of IHEU's delegation to the United Nations, [told the UN Human Rights Council](#) that secular democracy is "essential" for the defence and advancement of human rights, and for "guaranteeing inclusivity and ensuring four principles underscoring human rights: freedom, equality, dignity and universalism."

Ms O'Casey said secularism is "necessary for individual freedom. Its origins are rooted in the principle of free thought, from which many other rights guaranteeing freedoms emanate – such as freedom of religion or belief and expression.

"It is necessary for equality. Underpinning secularism is the equality of all under the law and a rejection of discriminatory traditional, cultural or religious practices.

"It is necessary for human dignity. It identifies individuals as equal citizens and not merely members of a religious or non-religious group; this gives dignity to the individual as a human rights bearer, not to be stereotyped as a member of a particular group or fetishized for the sake of inherently divisive identity politics.

"It is necessary for universalism. Whilst a secular democracy creates space for dialogue and the recognition of diversity, it asks that arguments are presented in universal terms so as to ensure mutual understanding. It is upon these universal foundations our rights and the vocabulary common to all humankind are grounded.

"Secular democracy provides a backdrop essential for the prevention of human rights violations."

Ms O'Casey added that human rights "will only flourish in a political framework where people are seen as human rights agents and not defined primarily by their beliefs or arbitrary characteristics [such as gender or race].

The statement called on the High Commissioner and Council to explore the role of secularism in the protection of human rights.

The Human Rights Council has attracted [serious criticism](#) this week after it [emerged](#) that Saudi Arabia had been selected to head a key UN human rights panel.

Video: Oral Statement on the Holy See's failure to protect the rights of the child. Delivered by Ms. Josephine Macintosh of the European Humanist Federation on 22 September 2015.

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