

NSS raises Italy's response to child abuse in Catholic Church at UN

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The National Secular Society has urged the UN Human Rights Council to strengthen recommendations designed to tackle child abuse in the Catholic Church in Italy.

In a statement to the council, NSS vice-president Josephine Macintosh said abusers in the church "cannot be allowed to continue committing crimes with impunity".

Experts consider Italy's response to sexual abuse to be "[one of the worst](#)" among Western nations. Over the past two decades, just 140 of the 300 Catholic priests who have been accused have been investigated. Very few of those convicted have been to prison.

Josephine Macintosh's statement called for the recommendations laid out in a recent report from the UN committee on the rights of the child (CRC) to be broadened in an upcoming report.

The CRC report's recommendations included that Italy:

- Adopt a national plan to combat abuse;
- Establish an independent commission on abuse in the Catholic Church;
- Introduce a law mandating the reporting of alleged sexual abuse to state authorities.

The NSS argued that:

- Mandatory reporting of abuse should include a criminal offence for those within institutions who know about or suspect it on reasonable grounds and fail to report it to external agencies;
- There should be [no exemption](#) for abuse which is disclosed within the confessional;
- Civil law should be revised to provide "much more substantial damages and reparations" to victims.

Guidelines from the Italian bishops' conference only commit to a "moral obligation" to report abuse. The NSS's statement added that the "weak and conviction-less aspirations" that these guidelines set out are undermined by opt-outs.

The NSS's intervention was made during the consideration of Italy's universal periodic review at the 43rd regular session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

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Watch the NSS's statement

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