

UN “concerned” about role of Catholic Church in Polish schools

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A United Nations committee has echoed many concerns raised by the National Secular Society relating to the Catholic Church and child rights in Poland.

In its latest periodic report on Poland, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child included recommendations relating to education, LGBT+ rights and clerical abuse which the NSS proposed in its [submission](#) to the committee in 2020.

The committee is responsible for monitoring compliance with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) among state parties.

In its 2020 submission, the NSS told the committee that although the law requires schools to provide classes in both ethics and religion, a large proportion of schools only provide religion classes. These classes are invariably Catholic confessional classes and are routinely presented as compulsory by schools, the NSS said.

In response, the committee said it was "concerned" about the role the Catholic Church plays in public education. It recommended ethics classes be available in all schools as an alternative to religion classes, and that the secular public school system "promote a culture of equality and inclusion".

LGBT+ rights and RSE

The NSS reported on the problem of discrimination and harassment of LGBT+ pupils in Poland, recommending training to address anti-LGBT bullying.

The committee agreed with the recommendation and said homophobic behaviour should be addressed "in particular in the context of religion classes".

The NSS also highlighted Poland's public discrimination and hate speech against LGBT+ people, including the establishment of '[LGBT-free zones](#)', meant LGBT+ rights, women's reproductive rights and comprehensive relationships and sex education (RSE) are cast as a "sinister, co-ordinated threat to traditional values".

It said RSE should be provided for by law and be "relevant" and "based on science and human rights standards".

The committee agreed, recommending all adolescents "have access to comprehensive, age-appropriate, science based and gender stereotype-free education" on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church

The NSS highlighted evidence that the scale of clerical child sexual abuse in Poland is substantial and prosecutors are expected to treat the church with deference.

It said the [concordat between Poland and the Holy See](#) appeared to "compromise the effective administration of justice" and impeded Poland's ability to conform to the CRC. It recommended Poland make "greater efforts" to secure secular justice for victims and survivors.

The committee said it "remains concerned" about limited information on the investigation, prosecution and sanction of cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy. It said Poland should continue its efforts to ensure all child sex abuse cases are reported, investigated and prosecuted, including those perpetrated by members of the Catholic Church.

It also recommended collecting data relating to sexual abuse involving Catholic clergy.

NSS comment

NSS president Keith Porteous Wood welcomed the committee's recommendations.

He said: "It is very encouraging to see the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child echoing so many of our concerns and directly addressing the role of the Catholic Church in violations of children's rights.

"The committee must now do all it can to ensure Poland adequately responds to these concerns, without letting deference to the Church undermine its efforts."

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