

International Humanist and Ethical Union

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: 12th Session (14 Sept – 2 October 2009)

Speaker: IHEU Representative, Keith Porteous Wood: Tuesday 22 September 2009

Agenda Item 4: Matters requiring the attention of the Council

Child Abuse and the Holy See

Mr President,

In 1990 the Holy See acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It submitted its first and only report in 1994 about which CRC expressed several areas of concern¹. But since then – nothing.²

The extent of child abuse within the Catholic Church is well known. What we are addressing here, however, is the reaction of the Church authorities over which the Holy See exerts control.

- Victims have been accused of lying, even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary.
- The Church has covered up allegations, and generally failed to inform the civil authorities, even when obliged to do so. Moreover, dioceses have frequently moved alleged abusers from one location to another, resulting in repetition of the abuse.³
- Clerics implicated in concealment have been permitted to remain in office, such as Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston⁴ who still enjoys papal support as archpriest of a papal basilica in Rome, and is still a cardinal.
- The Church has argued that the problem was minor, [that it did not know the true extent of the problem, or was ignorant of the nature of child abusers or of their recidivist tendencies] yet the scale of the problem has been known to the Church since at least the 1980s.⁵

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/3ae6aec910.pdf>

² <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/topics/other/documents/2002rightsofthechildshadowreport.pdf>

³ Example: Diocese of Dallas:
http://www.richardsipe.com/reports/sipe_report.htm#DIOCESE%20OF%20DALLAS

⁴ http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/top/features/documents/01847611.htm

⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2548081.stm> although it has treatment centres for child abusing priests (Richard Snipe http://www.richardsipe.com/reports/sipe_report.htm Fourth phase)

- Every possible step has been taken by the Church to minimise both criminal sanctions and the amount of compensation it paid.
- ["Gagging" clauses are routinely imposed as part of the settlement of cases].⁶

[Mr President, the Holy See has been complicit in widespread attempts to cover up cases of alleged child abuse perpetrated by members of its clergy and religious orders, apologies are rare, and a general admission of the Church's culpability has yet to be seen.]

We urge the Holy See to recognise its responsibilities to children and the CRC, to bring its reporting up to date, and to instruct its dioceses and religious orders⁷ to report all cases of alleged child abuse to the civil authorities. We suggest that as an institution that claims to have "the highest moral authority", it can do no less.

And we urge the international community to hold the Holy See to account.

Thank you sir.

(Text in square brackets omitted from delivered speech due to time constraints)

⁶ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6354966.ece>

⁷ <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-Executive%20Summary.pdf>