

Vatican Refuses to Share Sex Abuse Investigations With UN Panel

The Vatican refused to provide a United Nations rights panel with information on the Church's internal investigations into the sexual abuse of children by clergy, saying on Tuesday that its policy was to keep such cases confidential.

In response to a series of tough questions posed by the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the **Holy See** said it would not release information on its internal investigations into abuse cases unless required to do so by a request from a state or government to cooperate in legal proceedings.

The response of the Holy See, which will be directly questioned by the panel in January, will be closely watched as it tries to draw a line under financial scandals and abuse by priests that have damaged the standing of the **Roman Catholic Church** around the world.

Since becoming the first non-European pontiff in 1,300 years, **Pope Francis** has largely succeeded in changing the subject after the resignation of Benedict XVI in February.

The questions from the panel aimed to assess the Church's adherence to the 1990 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, a treaty guaranteeing a full range of human rights for children which the Holy See has signed.

In its response the **Vatican** said internal disciplinary proceedings "are not open to the public" in order to protect "witnesses, the accused and the integrity of the Church process," but said this should not discourage victims from reporting crimes to state authorities.

However, it said state laws, including the obligation to report crimes, must be respected.

The Holy See noted it was “deeply saddened by the scourge of sexual abuse” and emphasized that it had changed the requirements for admitting candidates for priesthood, updated canon law, and asked bishops’ conferences to draw up guidelines to combat abuse.

But it indicated the Vatican could not be held responsible for the behavior of institutions or individual **Catholics** around the world and said local bishops had the responsibility of ensuring children were protected.

“The Holy See does not exercise effective control over the local activities of Catholic institutions around the world,” the response read, indicating the Catholic Church’s central administration could only be held accountable for events within the Vatican City State.

The advocacy group the Center for Constitutional Rights criticized the responses as too vague.

“In claiming it only bears responsibility for what happens inside Vatican City and blaming the lack of prevention ... on local governments, the Holy See has taken one of its most explicitly disingenuous and misleading positions on the issue to date,” the rights group said in a statement.

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