

# **THE CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

## **Principles from Gospel values and International Law**

### **The rights of the child**

Children are human beings with intrinsic dignity and irreducible worth. They do not ask to be born, and justice and freedom are therefore their birthright. For children 'freedom' includes the possibility to grow and develop free from neglect, harm, abuse and exploitation... 'Justice' includes access to basic care and nurture in a safe, permanent, stable environment. This includes freedom from the injustices of abuse, neglect, and exploitation."

### **Principles from Gospel Values**

Children occupy a central place in the teachings of Jesus, who pointed to the child as the ultimate symbol of the kingdom of God. 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' (Lk 18:17). This places a sacred obligation on the Church, called to bear witness to the presence of the kingdom in the world, to ensure that children are welcomed, cherished and protected in a manner consistent with their central place in the life of the Church. The fact that Jesus reserved some of his severest warnings for those who would knowingly undermine the faith of one of these 'little ones' is a solemn reminder of the collective obligation of the Church to ensure the care and protection of children and young people.

The principles derived from Gospel values are:

- Each child shall be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all.
- Everyone in the church has an obligation to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are respected.
- A child's right to safety and care is inalienable.
- Children have a right to an environment free from abuse or neglect.
- Children have a fundamental right to justice and freedom; they have a right to be listened to and to be heard.
- Children have a right to good role models whom they can fully trust, who will respect them and nurture their spiritual, physical and emotional development.
- Those who have suffered child abuse by church personnel should receive a compassionate and just response and should be offered appropriate pastoral care as they seek to rebuild their lives.

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### Principles from international law

The Preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the Holy See are signatories, states that the child is entitled to be brought up 'in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity'. The Preamble recalls that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that 'childhood is entitled to special care and assistance'. In specific articles, the Convention states the principle that 'in all actions concerning children... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'; the right of the child to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and from any other kind of exploitation or abuse; the obligation of States Parties to take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children who have been the victims of abuse or exploitation."

Principles derived from civil sources are:

- ❖ All adults have a duty to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse, where reasonable grounds for concern exist, irrespective of the status of the person suspected or their relationship to them or to the child.
- ❖ Due regard must be given to the criminal dimension of any action.
- ❖ It is the statutory duty of the civil authorities, not individuals or organizations, to investigate reports of child abuse.
- ❖ A proper balance must be maintained between protecting children and respecting the needs of and rights of careers and adults; however, where there is a conflict, the welfare of the child must be paramount.
- ❖ Actions taken to protect a child should not in themselves be abusive or cause the child unnecessary distress. Every action and procedure should consider the overall needs of the child.
- ❖ Organizations have a corporate responsibility to operate effective systems to assure the protection of children. They should ensure best practice in relation to recruitment and selection processes, provide appropriate training and ensure that all personnel are aware of their responsibility both to prevent child abuse and to report concerns about child abuse.
- ❖ All agencies and disciplines concerned with the protection and welfare of children must work cooperatively in the best interests of children.