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Press Conference to present the Annual Report of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding

At midday today, a press conference was held in the Holy See Press Office, Via della Conciliazione, 54, to present the first Annual Report of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding.

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., metropolitan archbishop of Boston, United States of America, chair of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, and Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, jurist, in charge of the Annual Report.

The following were present: Bishop Luis Manuel Alí Herrera, auxiliary of Bogotá, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors; Teresa Morris Kettelkamp, adjunct secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors; Juan Carlos Cruz, promoter of the rights of survivors of clerical abuse in the world, consultant in communication, and Sr. Niluka Perera, of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, coordinator of Catholic Care for Children International (CCCI).

The following are the interventions of His Eminence Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., and Maud de Boer-Buquicchio:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap.

We are here today to present our pilot Annual Report on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding. Before we begin our presentation of the document, we would like to be very clear: The Commission's work – including this report – is and always has been about recognition and inclusion of victims and survivors of abuse in the life of the Church.

This pilot Report, which comes as the Commission marks its 10th anniversary, is a snapshot of the journey of

conversion that we have been on. It is a journey towards a transparent and accountable ministry of safeguarding, towards greater outreach, welcome, and support for victims and survivors, in their pursuit of justice and healing.

The path that has led us here today is one that no one could have fully foreseen. Not only does it span decades, but it also extends across an untold number of painfully lived experiences, which we might only hope to acknowledge, respect, and honor to the best of our ability, always striving to do better.

Allow me to try and help us understand this path, leading with humility and compassion, by describing our journey as a Church in the context of two periods.

The first period I have experienced continuously over nearly 40 years as a bishop. Through personal closeness to victims, their families, loved ones and their communities I have heard powerful testimonies of the betrayal from being abused by a person in whom you have placed your trust, and the lifelong implications of that abuse. I am tremendously grateful to the victims, for their openness – allowing me to journey with them. Indeed, it is only by listening to them directly that we can learn the truth of their human dignity being repeatedly violated. Their stories reveal a deceitful period where Church leaders tragically failed those we are called to shepherd. It is an unprofessional period where Church leaders make decisions without any adherence to policies, procedures or basic standards of concern for the victims. It is a dark period where distrust obstructs the Church's ability to be a witness to Christ.

There is then a second period - one that we are beginning to see take shape, in so many parts of the globe, and where accountability, care and concern for victims is beginning to bring light to the darkness. It is a period where robust reporting systems are in place allowing us to listen and respond to victims, with a trauma-informed approach. It is a period where risk management protocols and informed oversight promote safe environments. It is a period where the Church provides professionalized victim accompaniment services, as a commitment to the journey toward healing. It is a period where all of those ministering and working in the Church are provided with the training and formation they need to promote a culture of safeguarding. It is a period where the Church fully embraces her safeguarding ministry.

Our journey as Church, including what brings us together today, is a story of our experience and progress between these two periods. Here the wisdom of Nelson Mandela's concept of our long walk to freedom rings true. Indeed, the pilot Annual Report aims to show where we are, in our journey on that continuum, across the various parts of the Church.

In this way the Annual Report serves to hold a record of our path of conversion, while also encouraging the continued road ahead. The Annual Report accompanies that ongoing transition, with recognition that there is still much needing to be done.

I want to speak briefly on the Commission's own journey, as we recently marked the 10-year anniversary of its establishment. Consistent with the Holy Father's vision, the Commission originally set out to acknowledge and address the lack of space for victims and survivors in the Church, to be heard and understood. Over its first two mandates, the Commission

welcomed victims' testimonies from throughout the world, to build a body of knowledge on how the Church can better adopt a victim-centered approach to safeguarding. This body of knowledge directly informs the analysis found in this Annual Report. Then, in its third iteration, and upon the Holy Father's promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, the Commission was placed within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Our mission to collaborate with the Dicastery emphasized the need to ensure that the Church's justice and prevention measures are coherent in their complementarity. It also formally made the Commission a permanent institution of the Church, tasked with accompanying and assisting with the local Churches' safeguarding ministry.

We enact that accompaniment mandate through three pillars. The first is policy review and victims' advocacy, where we evaluate and suggest improvements to the safeguarding policies and procedures adopted by the

various Church entities spread throughout the world, in almost all countries. The second is capacity building through the Commission's Memorare Initiative, to promote the effective implementation of those policies and procedures. The third is reporting through the Annual Report, to document progress, deficiencies, and recommendations. These three interrelated activities are active on an ongoing basis and this iterative cycle forms the Commission's model for promoting change.

Allow me to conclude with a word of gratitude to several people and groups in particular. First, I thank our Holy Father for his bold vision and leadership in promotion of the Church's closeness to victims and commitment to its safeguarding ministry. Second, I thank the Commission's members - past and present - whose expertise and lifetime commitment to victims and their communities is deserving of our highest admiration. Third, I would like to thank the Commission's personnel who have worked tirelessly to see this project realized. Fourth, I would like to thank all the Church entities, covered in this report, that engaged in earnest with the Commission's methodology. Their collaboration with this process is a testimony of a meaningful and ongoing progress of conversion. And finally, above all, I would like to thank the victims and survivors, and their families, loved ones and communities whose resolve has made this day possible by their courage to speak out, calling the Church and her leadership to accountability. Thank you for your testimony and witness. It is to you that this Annual Report is dedicated.

Intervention of Maud de Boer-Buquicchio

Let me start with a word of humility to those victims and survivors, known and unknown, who may be listening, or reading about this Annual Report. In the course of my professional career, spanning over half a century, at the international and global level, dedicated to combating violence against children in all its forms – and in particular sexual abuse and exploitation - I have seen and heard first-hand the urgent and resounding call for accountability and justice. For too long this call has gone unanswered in the Church, when it comes to responding to abuse committed by the clergy. Yet with this first Annual Report we, as a Commission, are engaging Church leadership at its highest levels - be it in the local Churches or the Church's governance structure in the Vatican - in acknowledging the urgent need to better answer that call.

In drafting our first Report, mandated by the Holy Father to report on progress, we privileged a dialogue with our interlocutors wherever and whenever possible. We realize it is far from perfect, but it has a sound methodology that will build over time, to become increasingly comprehensive and robust. Of course, this first and foremost includes direct learnings from victims and survivors. Then, in the years ahead we will also develop our outreach to more comprehensively include the religious and the lay faithful. Finally, we know we, in collaboration with many others, need to significantly improve our data verification, through cross references with external sources.

Our conceptual framework is comparable to what in international law is referred to as Transitional Justice. This framework is inspired by human rights law and is deeply consistent with Catholic teaching. Precisely because of its consistency with Catholic teaching we believe the term Conversional Justice is most applicable to the Church's context while still exploring the 4 interconnected core principles of: (1) truth, (2) justice, (3) reparations, and (4) the guarantee of non-recurrence, in other words institutional reform. The combination of these principles will ensure a transition, that is, the Church's conversion away from times of widespread sexual abuse that is frequently mishandled and covered up — to a new period when policies for safeguarding, reporting, investigations, and care for victims/survivors make abuses rare, and provide appropriate responses. Or, as the Cardinal has said: our walk from darkness to light. The Commission's research, published on our website, explains how each of these principles are analogous to fundamental theological concepts in Catholic doctrine and tradition.

The Annual Report is a tool of conversional justice in two main ways. First, it records the critical transitions, as they progressively occur in different parts of the Church around the world. This transition is characterized by the initial development, implementation and inculturation of safeguarding policies, guidelines and procedures. Second, through its sharing of good practices it accompanies the continued pastoral conversion required to integrally consolidate the new period – as characterized by the advancement of truth, justice, reparations, and

institutional reform.

This report also promotes the Church's commitment to a rigorous human rights-based and victim focused response to the scourge of abuse – consistent with the recent reforms of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law that frames the crime of abuse as a violation of the dignity of the human person. As I have often been quoted, “Children are not mini human beings with mini human rights”. The reform to Book VI and this Annual Report contribute towards ensuring that truth, which is first and foremost about breaking the silence and meeting victims where they are.

Because of the Commission's global purview, this report and its subsequent editions are uniquely positioned to work towards a comprehensive account of the policies and procedures across each of the capillary realities of the Church. In its First Section it focuses on the safeguarding practices of the local Churches, where Catholics live out their day-to-day lives around the world, in their parishes and communities, and place their trust. The Second Section focuses on trends across the continental regions, providing an insight into the regional variations of the response to abuse in its manifold manifestations. The Third Section focuses on the safeguarding practices of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, in an attempt to promote an “all-of-government” approach to safeguarding for the Universal Church. The Fourth Section focuses on the Church's entities operating in the broader society, as they aim to serve populations also outside the Church.

Based on my experience as UN Special Rapporteur on sexual exploitation of children reporting to the UN Governance (General Assembly and Human Rights Council) on thematic or local issues, I stress the long-term impact of such reporting mechanisms, as the result of a cumulative sequence across my predecessors' and successors' reports, which are always the fruit of dialogue with numerous stakeholders. The reporting tool that we are presenting today is one that will allow the Church to offer victims and their communities an honest account of progress and persistent gaps over time - accompanied by recommendations for those who are in a position to do so, to fill these gaps. Regrettably, much of the Church remains without robust data collection practices or capacities. Yet, data is key to our ability to promote accountability. Therefore, we must commit to investing in the Church's data collection infrastructure and resources! In short, this is primarily a tool for accountability over time.

However, it also offers mechanisms for change in the short-term. In the report, the Commission makes specific recommendations to each Church entity that it covers. Alongside those recommendations, we assure those Church entities of our availability to help and to accompany them in their implementation endeavors. The bona-fide engagement and cooperation from Church authorities on implementing these recommendations is crucial for systemic and lasting change to occur.

The report also serves as a coordinating tool, for sharing good practices while also calling Church leadership, the faithful and all those of good will to urge their implementation. This is what it means to create a true culture of safeguarding – we are all called to participate, according to our respective roles and talents.

Finally: a note on the meaning of the depiction on the Annual Report's front cover. Native to large parts of the African continent, the “baobab” tree is often known as the “tree of life” and is an important symbol of resilience and community. We believe that this might serve as a concrete sign of our support to each and every victim, whistleblower or any other person, in an atmosphere of trust and safety. With a change of mindset that accompanies our path of conversional justice, the Church can offer the protective environment that this tree symbolises.

It is my prayer that today might be one of those moments that history will look favorably on, or better yet: a moment in time that our little ones, the little ones that Jesus asked us to protect, will look upon as a promise for a Church safe for everyone.
