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Briefing sui lavori della Commissione per la Tutela dei minori

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Alle ore 13.00 di oggi, nell'*Aula Giovanni Paolo II* della Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, ha luogo un briefing sui lavori della Commissione per la Tutela dei minori.

Interviene l'Em.mo Card. Seán Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., Arcivescovo di Boston, Presidente della Commissione per la Tutela dei minori, accompagnato da due Membri della Commissione: Sr. Kayula Gertrude Lesa, RSC, dallo Zambia e il Sig. Peter Saunders, dall'Inghilterra.

Di seguito pubblichiamo il testo dell'intervento del Card. O'Malley:

Intervento del Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, OFM Cap.

Thank you for your presence here and especially for your interest in Child Protection.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, sent a very important letter to Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and to Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, dated February 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple. Even the date of the letter is symbolic as we work to make the Temple a safe place to bring children.

By means of the letter the Holy Father is presenting the new commission to the Church's leadership and inviting them to cooperate in the arduous task of working for the safety of children.

The Holy Father reflects on his own experience of meeting persons who had suffered sexual abuse by priests. He writes, "this experience reaffirmed my conviction that everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused."

The Holy Father urges Bishops and Religious Superiors to assure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and to offer survivors and their families pastoral care and provide for psychological assistance. The Holy Father urges Bishops and Religious Superiors to meet with survivors and their loved ones. He says, "such meetings are valuable opportunities for listening to those who have greatly suffered and for asking their forgiveness."

Following on the Holy Father's letter to the Bishops Conferences, I am writing as President of the Commission to request that each conference name a contact person who can help establish a line of communication with the conferences as well as with Religious Superiors.

Pope Francis in his letter has spoken of the Circular Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of May 3, 2011, calling on the Bishops' Conferences of the world to draw up guidelines for handling cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics.

One of the tasks of the Commission, working with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, will be to reach out to help suggest best practices, especially to conferences that are finding it difficult to develop policies. The Commission is also tasked to promote education and child safety programs and to present methods for measuring compliance.

Today I am joined by two of our new members of the Commission. Sister Kayula Lesa, a Religious Sister of Charity from Zambia, has extensive experience in education and in child protection. Sister has worked with refugees and victims of human trafficking, and has served on the African Forum for the Church's Social Teaching.

We are also joined by Mr. Peter Saunders from South West London. Mr. Saunders established NAPAC, the National Association for People Abused in Childhood, for supporting all survivors and for developing greater resources for responding to child abuse.

Yesterday we had the first full day of meetings of the entire seventeen member Commission, with new representation from Africa, Asia, South America and Oceania. I am truly impressed by the wealth of experience and commitment that all the members bring to the Commission.

We are currently working to develop seminars to educate Church leadership in the area of child protection. We hope to offer these programs for members of the Roman Curia and for newly appointed bishops who come to Rome from throughout the world, for orientation programs sponsored by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The Commission is also preparing materials for a Day of Prayer for all those who have been harmed by sexual abuse. Such an activity underscores our responsibility to work for spiritual healing and also helps raise consciousness among the Catholic community about the scourge of child abuse.

We have also begun to reach out to Catholic funding organizations, to ask them to include some requirements concerning child protection in their guidelines for eligibility for funding. Realizing that many of the countries that need to do the most work to advance child protection are also often terribly lacking in resources, we are asking the funding organizations to award grants in these counties for establishing child protection programs and providing training for Church personnel.

The Commission is establishing a series of working groups to call on the expertise of individuals who are not members but can provide us valuable assistance. We have one working group which has been charged with the task of outreach to survivors who might contribute to our efforts by their participation, especially concerning issues of prevention and sound guidelines.

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