



Consejo nacional de prevención de abusos
a menores de edad y acompañamiento a víctimas
Conferencia Episcopal de Chile

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COUNCIL OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CHILE (CECH) ON THE PREVENTION
OF ABUSE OF MINORS AND AID TO VICTIMS – IRISH COLLEGE, ROME, 7 JULY 2014*

I. INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by expressing my excitement and gratitude for being here this afternoon.

I would like to start by letting you know something quite emotional: the issue of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is one of the most painful and difficult things that I have had to deal with, as I believe it has also been for the Church as a whole, not only because violating the integrity of children and youth is such a severe offense, but also because this abuse has been committed in my homeland by various fellow priests who have devoted their life to the service of the Lord and the Church and promised to spend their life dignifying and defending each human being, in particular the most vulnerable. This is a hard thing for us to understand and it is difficult to accept that it is the outcome of mistakes that we could have done either during their formation or in the accompaniment of these brothers. It is a terrible thing that deeply moves believers like us, and calls upon us to make our utmost efforts to keep it from continuing to happen, to the extent possible, and to heal the often considerable damage that has been caused.

And I also wish to extend my very special gratitude to the Anglophone Conference for having allowed Chile to be a part of it over the years. The knowledge and experience acquired here have undoubtedly been a crucial basis from which to address this painful subject in our country and to design actions and initiatives that the National Council over which I preside has been gradually implementing. Similarly, the involvement of priests and professionals from Chile in this conference has strengthened their personal commitment because they can partake of the Spirit reigning here. My sincere thanks to all of you for this precious support.

II. THE SITUATION IN CHILE AND SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN THE CHURCH

This has been a very painful subject in Chile. Priests have been reported to be sexual abusers of young boys and girls, which has shaken the Church to its core and had a great impact on our



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Society, even causing us to lose credibility and trust as an institution in the eyes of the inhabitants of our nation.

Thus far 27 priests and one deacon have been convicted of crimes against minors, both before the civil and ecclesiastical tribunals.

In this context, on April 8, 2011, the "Message of Bishops to Catholics and the People of Chile" was delivered at the end of the Plenary Assembly, signed by all bishops. The section entitled "resolutions" propose to update the 2002 Protocol and created the National Council on Prevention, whose mission started a little bit later. It meets monthly and also three National Symposia were held from 2011 to 2013. The fourth will be held soon and will be attended, among others, by representatives of the dioceses, religious congregations, and education vicars.

The fundamental premises for our work are humbly and painfully recognizing these dramatic situations; keep as primary concern to protect the victims and the innocent and assume the need for truth as an unavoidable evangelical duty to the humble transit from the Crib to the Calvary.

Nowadays, and after this path, that we are aware have just started, we can identify those issues in which our steps are slower and those where they can become stronger.

III. OUR CHALLENGES

Some of the main challenges that we are facing are:

1. The differences between the Diocesan Commissions. Not all function with the same regularity or are developing preventive measures or accompanying victims in their respective territories.
2. The clergy have demonstrated a concern that the protocols expose them to false claims and my brothers Bishops show some difficulties to face the need to be accountable
3. No national modality has yet been devised for religious to follow the same rules as the Diocesan clergy.
4. Accompanying victims have been addressed very incipiently and only by some ecclesiastical authorities. The need still exists to address this aspect in a more structured and integral manner. The same is true for the families and communities in which abuse has occurred.
5. Also pending are the cases of priests who have been accused and sentenced. A constant and generalized support is still needed to provide professional and spiritual guidance and accompaniment to these brothers.



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IV. OUR "SIGNS OF GROWTH"

The National Council on Prevention depends on the Permanente Council and through its National Coordinator collaborates on creating close ties with the different areas of the Chilean Episcopal Conference promoting the pastoral approach of this matter.

The idea of third-party guarantors and facilitators of implanting a healthy and protective context has been gradually implemented. They help to break the silence, to report, and to accompany communities in their efforts to prevent abuse.

Guidelines will be a complete and integrated regulatory framework for our work. The response by the Chilean Church to the initial request by the CDF and the observations that CDF made resulted in the approval of these guidelines under the descriptive name of "Care and Hope." They represent the orientation that the Church in our country will follow in responding to these delicate situations.

Understanding that the prevention of sexual abuse is a complex issue based in abuse of power, moves us to create safe and protected environments for young boys and girls and any vulnerable person.

We understand the meaning of restoration as a process that must involve the victim, his or her family and the entire community affected. We have realized that there is a need to repair wounded communities by a process of accompaniment and reparation of the damage that has been suffered, no longer from the perspective of the individual but rather from a social perspective.

The historic contribution that the Church in Chile has made in connection with Human Rights enables us to take on the challenge of social reparation. With the help of a study prepared by María Josefina Martínez, a psychologist and member of our National Council has enlightened us on this subject.

From the Human Rights perspective and different viewpoint of modes of reparation, it has been said that socially, the existing distinction between material reparation and symbolic reparation is used. Depending on who is the beneficiary of those measures, the reparation may also be either individual or collective.

While material reparation can consist of economic compensation or access to packages composed of education, health and/or housing, symbolic reparation includes a recognition to the victims through official or public apologies, a change in the name of public spaces, the



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establishment of commemorative days, and the creation of museums and memorials, among other measures.

If human rights violations are irreparable, does reparation make sense? In what way? If it is no longer possible to repair the damage, what is left for us to do?

It has been said that the only reparation possible is collective, to society, and it is oriented towards a thorough understanding of the truth of the facts and of the administration of justice.

So, reparation is considered to be a social process that has personal and collective dimensions. It makes room for recognition of the damage and of the trauma, for individual and collective mourning and the joint construction of the real truth.

To conceive of social reparation, a definition of how to repair what is irreparable will be required. So, given how irreversible the damage is, the reparation aims to create the context that makes it possible to mourn and to explain the traumatic experience; to modify structural aspects that facilitated the violations, the chronification of violations; and creating better living conditions for the people whose basic rights were violated.

In summary, many contributions could be taken from the human rights perspective, especially concerning social reparation. Our Church now faces the challenge of using those contributions to further the necessary reparation of those who have suffered.

Based on the ideas and proposals that Josefina, our psychologist, has contributed, about the need to build social restoration based on truth, transparency, remembrance, the need to break the silence and justice, I would like to share with you paraphrasing Saint Francis' Simple Prayer:

Lord, where there is a lie, let there be truth

Where there is concealment, let there be transparency

Where there is forgetfulness, let there be remembrance

Where there is silence, let the voices be raised

Where there is denial, let us encourage recognition

Where there is impunity, let us construct justice