

UN panel questions Vatican record on child sex abuse

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Vatican City

The Vatican has been called to give detailed information on its record on child sexual abuse to a United Nations panel, a move that will show how Pope Francis wants to handle an issue that has deeply scarred the Catholic church's image in the past decade.

The Geneva-based U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child has asked the Vatican to "provide detailed information on all cases of child sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy, brothers and nuns."

The request comes ahead of the Vatican's scheduled appearance in front of the committee in January.

All countries that have ratified the 1990 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child must submit to a periodic evaluation of their performance on child protection. The Vatican was among the first countries to ratify the treaty.

According to the "List of Issues" submitted by the U.N. committee, the Vatican will have to explain the measures it has put in place to "ensure that no member of the clergy currently accused of sexual abuse be allowed to remain in contact with children."

The Vatican will also have to detail cases when "priests were transferred" after being accused of abuse, as well as its compensation policy for abuse victims, and whether compensation was linked to requiring victims to sign confidentiality agreements.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, an abuse victims support group, testified in front of the committee last month, presenting a shadow report on the Vatican's record.

According to SNAP President Barbara Blaine, the U.N. committee questioning of the Vatican is "giving survivors all over the world hope."

Msgr. Massimo De Gregori, a member of the Holy See's diplomatic mission to Geneva, stressed that the questioning was a "routine procedure."

"While we don't deny the gravity (of child sex abuse), someone is trying to take advantage" of the U.N. committee procedure, he said.

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