

## Vatican to UN: Don't equate sexual abuse of minors with torture

Josephine McKenna | May. 2, 2014  
Vatican City

As Vatican representatives prepare to testify before a United Nations inquiry into torture next week, a senior official warned investigators that it would be "deceptive" to link torture with the pedophilia scandals that have swept the Catholic church.

The Vatican's chief spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, said Friday that the Convention Against Torture, endorsed by the Vatican in 2002, was one of the most important in the U.N.'s ambit.

Lombardi also stressed in a statement the Holy See's "strong commitment against any form of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment."

But he urged the U.N. committee, which is holding three weeks of hearings in Geneva, to resist pressure from nongovernmental organizations "with a strong ideological character" that are intent on including the sexual abuse of minors in a discussion about torture.

"The extent to which this is deceptive and forced is clear to any unbiased observer," Lombardi said.

But the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which represents 18,000 victims, said Friday that hundreds of children and adults were still being "sexually violated, tortured and assaulted" by Catholic priests.

"Torture and violence can be subtle and manipulative. Or it can be blatant and brutal," said SNAP President Barbara Blaine in a statement. "Either way, it's horribly destructive to the human spirit, especially when inflicted on the young by the powerful, on the truly devout by the allegedly holy."

"Nothing has succeeded in getting Vatican officials to stop this violence," she added.

In a separate inquiry in February, the U.N. watchdog for the human rights of the child issued a scathing report ordering the Holy See to open its files on clergy who had "concealed their crimes" and called on the church to remove suspected or known abusers.

In a rare interview in March, Pope Francis defended the church saying it had acted with "transparency and responsibility" on the issue.

In its submission, the group Catholic Voices USA told the U.N. committee Friday the church had become "the global model for the legal safeguarding of children" and church volunteers were often risking their lives to help the world's vulnerable.

"Were this committee to label the Holy See a sponsor of torture, the results would be bloody and tragic," Ashley McGuire, from the organization's advisory board, said Friday in Geneva.

Meanwhile, the Vatican's permanent observer to the U.N. in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, said in a

newspaper interview Friday the incidence of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy was "the lowest" among all the professions, including teachers and judges.

He said suggestions that the church was some kind of "incubator" for abusive clergy were "dishonest and illogical."

The pope recently established a committee headed by Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley to look at the issue of sex abuse and the committee's eight members have been holding their first meeting at the Vatican this week.

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