



**Address on the Pilot Annual Report of Maud de Boer-Buquicchio,
Chair of the Annual Report Committee, at the Plenary Assembly of
the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors**

Palazzo Maffei Marescotti, September 20, 2023.

Dear colleagues,

As Chair of Annual Report Committee allow me to make some introductory remarks.

Indeed, it was clear from the outset that the request for an Annual Report by the Holy Father was a daunting task and not “just difficult at first”, as he said it would be when he received us.

By way of introduction to the Annual Report, I offer you the following summary of our process thus far and a detailed description of the contents in this Pilot Annual Report.

I have had the privilege to work on a regular basis with an extraordinary team. Stefano and Nathan - who both deserve our gratitude for their incredible commitment and outstanding qualities and knowledge. I perceived my role as being a sounding board for them and to provide insight based on my global experience in the child rights and human rights area and providing my input on strategic choices. After my introduction, should you have any questions or comments, they will be pleased to respond, as they are the ones who know this Report by heart and line by line!

As the Cardinal mentioned in his opening remarks, the Commission has sought to adopt a victim-centered approach to the Annual Report, representing an important continuity between the former Commissions’ work, and the report we present today. This Report is the current Commission’s effort at developing a cumulative and inclusive tool to report on the Church's prevention and protection policies and practices around the world. This work recognizes the need to include recognizable standards that were grounded on input from individual local Churches – this is where victims’ reality is. This is how we meet victims where they are.

Last Plenary Assembly, we heard a powerful presentation from Professor David Smolin on the benefits of applying Transitional Justice to the Annual Report, as an overarching theoretical framework. As a Plenary Assembly we approved the adoption of the principles of Transitional Justice, for the Commission's work, and especially for the Annual Report. These 4 inter-related pillars truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Transitional justice is a methodological framework based on human rights, and applied in transition, where a state or organization has committed large scale human rights violations and now commits to conversion. This approach is deeply consistent with Catholic Teaching in general, and the recent reform of Church Law – specifically the new Book VI of the Code of Canon Law. This reform now frames the crimes of abuse as an affront on the goods protected by law, namely: life, liberty and dignity of the human person.

Thus, Transitional Justice is a set of tools by which societies deal with legacies of crimes through certain fundamental principles that are proper to Catholic morality: truth, justice, reparation for the evil done, and ensuring that this evil cannot be repeated. In dealing with sexual abuse, Pope Francis, in his various reforms and speeches, has employed these principles to promote the conversion of the Church away from abuse. This conversion is what Professor Smolin explained is the spiritual analogy of Transition, in the secular transitional justice framework.

In this way, the Annual Report adopts a methodology that encompasses a perspective based on our values, and can seek to describe progressively--over 10 to 15 years--the whole church, in its various parts.

Each section has two main parts: (1) an introduction detailing the purpose, methodology and organization of that section, and (2) an application of that methodology to specific Church entities analyzed in this Pilot Report.

The Commission's analysis of each Church entity concludes with a short list of specific recommendations. These recommendations are especially meant to prompt further collaboration. We make it clear that while we are necessarily critical of these Church entities, we are also prepared to help!

In total we present the Commission's analysis on 25 Church entities. This represents a huge undertaking by the Annual Report team, but ultimately reflects the enormous series of engagements that the whole Commission had in 2023.

This report is also the result of a tremendous synodal process, led by our Annual Report team, by direction of the Plenary. As the Cardinal has already mentioned, on the occasion of our September 2023 Plenary Assembly, we approved a first draft of the Pilot Annual Report, which became known as the *Instrumentum Laboris*. We then instructed the Annual Report team to use that draft in dialogue with the various Church entities presented. That process saw 12 Church entities contribute directly to this dialectic process. These included: the Bishops' Conferences of Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Belgium, Cameroon; the religious Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Missionary Sisters of the Consolata; the

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Dicastery for the Clergy; Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Oceania, Caritas Chile, and Caritas Nairobi.

As part of our methodology and the transitional justice approach underpinning this report, these entities were invited to review and contribute to the drafting of their section, with information and discussion sessions held in Rome and around the world. In this sense, the Report has been a powerful tool of our accompaniment of countless Church stakeholders. This is something that Dr. Smolin highlighted in his speech to the Plenary, last September. It is a point that I want to emphasize again today. The Annual Report is a tool of transitional justice, to enable the conversion that we are called to promote. It does this in several different ways.

First, it does so in the very nature of its data collection methodology. The mere fact that we are asking Church leaders to think and reflect about safeguarding is already a monumental first step. We are talking about abuse, directly with Church authorities – many of which have ignored or avoided this topic at all costs. This happens most concretely in our Ad Limina visits. Tomorrow we will have the opportunity to participate in one of those Ad Limina visits, with the bishops from Tuscany. I trust you will see first-hand how our conversation is part of that conversion. The context of the Ad Limina visits, and our dedicated conversations with other Church authorities, including the various dicasteries, give space for an honest and safe conversation about such a delicate topic. Our Members and staff, that have participated in these Ad Limina visits and Curial meetings, often testify to this powerful effect. This helps to break down the protective barriers and culture of silence that so many of these Church authorities have built up. In doing so, our conversation can produce real fruit, and ultimately find its way into the first draft of each year's Annual Report.

That gives space for the second way the report serves as a tool of conversion. Once a first draft is produced it can be used, like this year, as an *Instrumentum Laboris* to continue our dialogue with the various Church entities. In the context of our Ad Limina countries, this continued dialogue can be understood as the Commission's ordinary follow-up with the local Churches, after their visit to Rome. Coordinated through the Regional Groups, this follow-up gives the local Church an opportunity to engage with the Commission's initial findings and recommendations – on that same path toward conversion. Similarly, follow-up conversations with the other Church entities covered - like the dicasteries and the Church's charitable organizations - follows this same logic. It is an opportunity to discuss the Commission's initial findings and recommendations.

Finally, once published, the Annual Report will make public its findings, to bring light to persistent gaps in a Church entity's safeguarding policies and practices. In that sense, the Report's recommendations guide the path forward. This commits the Commission and the Church authorities, hand-in-hand, to the work yet to be done. Importantly, in this long-term phase it allows us to track our progress, over time, so that we can continuously evaluate our efforts, and keep moving forward. This is the power of the Annual Report, at its best!

The Report is not designed primarily as an information document on the activities of the Commission itself. However, for the sake of transparency, it will still provide in the Appendix certain highlights of its internal life and activities. These include summaries of the Commission's decisions at its plenary meetings and other associated events. It will also include a section on administrative matters, including fundraising, personnel, capacity building initiatives, et cetera.

Now, a note on the version we review today. In the European group, who met the day after Fr. Small dispatched the 200-page draft, there was a strong sense for a significant need for further editing, design, and layout, but also some concerns content-wise. Also, the need for a shorter report was discussed. Therefore, a summary report, as an important tool for our Plenary conversation was proposed. I understand similar reactions were expressed in other groups.

From the moment the 200-page draft was shared with the Members, we all have had the opportunity for substantial reflection and to provide our direct feedback. Over half of our Members have engaged directly with the text, raising important questions, and suggesting amendments or edits whenever they felt it necessary. Every comment has been either discussed with their authors and resolved by the team, whenever possible, or flagged where further consideration by Members would be welcome. This is particularly important where recommendations have been formulated. The Holy Father expects us to advise him!

The report you have in front of you today, is the fruit of all of those edits. Again, all the merit goes to this incredible Annual Report team, who worked night and day to produce this text. We now have a 70-page version accompanied by an Appendix for us to review. Today, I focus our attention on that 70-page document with all of our recommendations. Consensus around these recommendations is our ultimate task today. Any final suggestions on which there is consensus will be included in our final report to the Holy Father – which we expect to be able to submit soon. Of course we also work toward a public version, to be released this summer, hopefully enriched by professional communications specialists.

I hope intensely that at the end of today's discussion we can achieve a sense of ownership of this Report to the Holy Father. It is far from perfect, but it has the merit of presenting the Holy Father with an initial attempt at a global picture of the state of safeguarding in the world, by a truly independent body. We can do better – that's for sure - but it is a learning process. Recent media have again questioned our capacity to do that. Well, I think we are showing we can. There is no going back.

As I look to conclude my introduction, I wish to provide several brief reflections on what we have already learned so far.

1. We are creating entirely new data sets and reporting channels. There is a very concerning gap in data across the Church. This includes even some of the most basic statistics. I remember the Annual Report team once discussing how a country in East Africa didn't even know how many priests it had – let alone any sort of safeguarding specific data! With that said, we are taking on an urgent and admirable

task. With this Annual Report project, we can build capacity around data literacy. That is an impressive legacy to leave.

2. This Annual Report project can help us build meaningful collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders committed to addressing this global data gap in the fight against abuse. These include, among others: UNICEF, Gallup, and victim's advocacy networks around the world. Importantly this data is not just about cases, it is about how abuse happens, and what are the institutional services to respond.
3. We need much larger investments in safeguarding around the world, and especially in the Global South. This Report has demonstrated enormous inequalities in safeguarding investments across countries. What we have found is that it is not always a lack of goodwill to address abuse, but a lack of means. This Report can shine an important light on these inequalities and promote solidarity across the Churches.
4. Our findings have renewed the urgency for adopting a multifaceted approach to our advice and recommendations. The Report has showed us that we cannot limit our analysis to decisions made at the universal level – at the Vatican - but must simultaneously accompany the local Churches, too. This is consistent with the Holy Father's Apostolic Constitution, which sets the Roman Curia at the service of both the universal and local Church. In this way, the Regional Groups' engagement with the Ad Limina process and their subsequent recommendations is essential. This is a place where Members can have a direct impact on our recommendations!

As a final note I highlight the long-term nature of this component of the Commission's mandate. This is a report that will find its full maturity over the next 10-15 years. As our colleague Benyam knows well, standardized reporting is crucial, but we will not necessarily see its fruits immediately. As such, let us understand this project at the service of generations to come. By publishing this report we are setting an enormous precedent. I believe that this important milestone will be at the service of "those little ones", of future generations - who we have yet to meet.

Now over to Stefano and Nathan to take us through the different sections.