

A Joint Statement Following the Meeting of the Comboni Survivors Group  
and the Comboni Missionaries, March 21-22, 2023, Rome.

From the Comboni Survivors Group

Recently, Pope Francis urged Church leaders to respond with concrete actions to the experience of survivors of child sexual abuse by clergy. As the Comboni Survivors Group, we have asked for concrete actions for many years from the Comboni Missionaries and we have been met mostly with either silence or doubts about the veracity of our claims. Many other victims have experienced similar reactions from Church leaders.

This atmosphere of fear and recrimination has started to change for us over the past several months as we have met with and been welcomed by the Comboni Missionaries' leadership, past and present. In our latest meeting, we were joined by the leadership from the London Province of the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries, who were responsible for dealing with our requests for help and engagement over the past 25 years. We shared our painful histories of abuse and the devastation brought on by the dreadful response we received from the London Province when we looked for help. During our meetings in these past few days, which included a meeting with Pope Francis, we feel that we were not only heard, but believed by the Comboni leadership, something that has brought us a sense of calm. This has been a transformative experience for us, vindicating our search for justice and dialogue as the only path of healing for those impacted by the wrong that was done to us. We look back at all the mistakes and misunderstandings we experienced over the years from the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries and feel a sense of despair at how so much suffering could have been avoided.

With goodwill and a common commitment to dialogue and action, the frustration and hurt we have carried for so many years can be channeled into making things different not only for ourselves but all those who face similar experiences to us. Pope Francis encouraged us to stay the course of dialogue and encounter, even during the darkest days. We are deeply grateful to the Comboni Missionaries for their kind invitation to come to Rome and we see in them allies on the path to healing and renewal. We are more hopeful than ever that this common journey is heading in a different and healthier direction for all of us and we are committed to walking this road together.

From the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries

We thank the members of the Comboni Survivors Group for accepting our invitation to come to Rome and to address members of our General Council and the leadership of the London Province, past and present. While we too have been impacted by the wrongdoing of some of the past actions of our confreres and cooperators, only recently have we come to fully understand the impact of lasting harm this abuse has caused to the lives of those entrusted to our care all those years ago. We deplore and condemn what happened. We also regret the

misunderstandings and missed opportunities when responding to the Comboni Survivors Group that unfortunately led to more harm and hurt to those who have suffered so much. We are truly sorry for the times we have not responded adequately, and we ask once again for forgiveness. We hope our time together can bring some peace and healing and we commit to further concrete actions to ease what has been a difficult road for them.

As members of the leadership of the Comboni Missionaries, we have heard their experiences and we believe their stories of pain and disappointment and we want to make things better as much as we can.

We commit to learning from these experiences and to incorporate them into our Institute's child protection programmes to ensure we can learn from the past and prevent any such abuse in the future. In dialogue, we will seek to find ways to provide needed pastoral care and support to each one of them, as much as we are able.

And lastly, we thank Pope Francis who met with us, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Bishop Marcus Stock and Fr. Andrew Small, OMI and all those who have helped bring us to this moment of grace. We call on the Lord's help who alone can make all things new.

/ENDS