

Children's Dignity and Children's Rights in the Digital World

On 6 October 2017 the attendees of the **World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World** presented the „The Declaration of Rome“ to Pope Francis. By his statement: *“A society can be judged by the way it treats its children.”* the Holy Father himself had set out the guiding principle for the call to action as laid down in the declaration. The Declaration concludes, “In this era of the internet the world faces unprecedented challenges if it is to preserve the rights and dignity of children and protect them from abuse and exploitation. These challenges require new thinking and approaches, heightened global awareness and inspired leadership.”

The Declaration of Rome urges the world's leaders, leaders of the world's great religions, parliaments and leaders of technology companies, the world's ministries of public health, government agencies, civil society and law enforcement, and religious institutions to undertake in their particular remit efforts to protect children from risks arising from the Internet and empower them to benefit from the opportunities for learning and individual development the Internet offers to them.

In accepting the Declaration Pope Francis said, *“...you have pointed out a variety of different ways to promote concrete cooperation among all concerned parties working to combat the great challenge of defending the dignity of minors in the digital world. I firmly and enthusiastically support the commitments you have undertaken.”*

During the World Congress the attendees developed in a joint effort the following **Strategic Plan for Implementing the Declaration of Rome** (published 15 October 2017)

The Mission: To create a global coalition of religions, governments, international organisations, scholars and researchers, civil society and others, working together toward a common goal: defending the dignity of minors and vulnerable adults in the digital world.

The Vision: To eradicate child sexual abuse and exploitation in the digital world and safeguard minors and vulnerable adults worldwide.

The Strategy: To achieve 13 goals recognizing the urgent need for an inter-sectoral strategic collaboration which calls upon technology leaders, political and religious leaders, health and social care professionals and others to share responsibility for achieving them.

- Goal 1: To raise awareness regarding the risks in the Digital World especially with respect to primary prevention and safeguarding, and undertake new social research.
- Goal 2: To mobilise faith leaders to support the implementation of the Declaration.
- Goal 3: To change state laws to be more effective in preventing abuse.
- Goal 4: To redefine the responsibilities and actions required by technology companies.
- Goal 5: To improve provision of child rescue and treatment services.
- Goal 6: To improve identification and interventions for children and young people at risk.
- Goal 7: To improve the capabilities and collaborative efforts of international law enforcement organisations.
- Goal 8: To train clinicians to better serve the needs of victims.

- Goal 9: To expand treatment resources for people harmed by abuse.
- Goal 10: To research the health impacts on young people of viewing pornographic images.
- Goal 11: To set safety standards, agree to a code of conduct, and mandate filtering and age verification to protect children from inappropriate online content.
- Goal 12: To improve education of children and young people.
- Goal 13: To ensure all citizens are alert to the risks of abuse and know how to report it.

The Children's Dignity and Children's Rights conference was held under the joint auspices of the Pontifical Gregorian University and the #We Protect Global Alliance. As such it represents a major development in terms of the range of stakeholders who now see and accept that the position of children in the digital world presents a series of significant contemporary challenges which require urgent attention.