

## **Promoting Digital Child Dignity: From Concept to Action**

### **International Meeting 2019 (14-15 November, at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences)**

*The Organizers of the meeting have presented to the participants the following action plan, which indicates the goals towards which they intend to continue their engagement, and have received from them their support.*

#### **An Action Plan**

**Introduction:** On 6 October 2017 the attendees of the World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World presented the Declaration of Rome to Pope Francis. 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.”***

On 20 November 2018 leaders of the world’s major faiths, meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, adopted the Abu Dhabi Declaration, concluding that ***“protecting the dignity of children is a cause that will unify and mobilize people across countries, cultures and faiths.”*** It urged them to ***“unite as faith leaders and join with people of all faiths to prevent harm to children and to promote children’s physical, social, psychological and spiritual development.”***

The two Declarations shared a vision of a digital world where children and vulnerable adults are respected and free to exercise their digital rights and are safe from exploitation and abuse. In his address to the World Congress in 2017, Pope Francis called for concrete action, including

***“...raising awareness of the gravity of the problems, enacting suitable legislation, overseeing developments in technology, identifying victims and prosecuting those guilty of crimes.. assisting minors who have been affected and providing for their rehabilitation, assisting educators and families, and finding creative ways of training young people in the proper use of the internet in ways healthy for themselves and for other minors.”*** He also called for ***“fostering greater sensitivity and providing moral formation, as well as continuing scientific research in all the fields associated with this challenge.”***

#### **Concrete Action**

The internet has changed our world, mostly for the better. But there is also a dark side which is harming the most vulnerable members of society. Children as young as infants and toddlers are now the targets of abuse for sophisticated online communities. As children grow and inevitably encounter the digital world themselves, they confront challenges like cyberbullying, harassment and sextortion. Child sexual abuse images, whose production has exploded with the advent of digital cameras in every mobile phone or tablet in the world, proliferate online. Internet pornography, unrestricted and pervasive in the digital world, bombards the developing brains of children and young people.

## **THE GOALS**

**Goal 1: To raise awareness of digital risks and make prevention the top priority.**

We propose to undertake a global prevention and awareness campaign. This campaign will include education on the nature and severity of child sexual abuse and exploitation online, its economic and financial impacts, early intervention with potential offenders before they offend, utilize the public health model and focus on primary prevention.

**Goal 2: To undertake new social research to provide better understanding of the scope and severity of child sexual abuse and exploitation online.**

We propose to convene a Research Task Force that will include some of the world's leading scholars and researchers in the field of child sexual abuse and exploitation to undertake foundational research on child sexual abuse and exploitation, both online and offline. In addition, this research will include an examination of the health impacts on young people of viewing pornographic and violent content online.

**Goal 3: To foster the collaboration with technology companies.**

We propose to establish an Internet Industry Roundtable to discuss the role of technology companies, and possible new standards, and work together to develop new tools and technologies to attack these problems, to take the necessary steps to another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.

**Goal 4: To mobilize the world's great religions to launch a global movement to protect children online.**

We propose to establish an Interfaith Roundtable to inform and engage members of every faith and launch a grassroots awareness campaign to enhance online child protection.

**Goal 5: To promote exchange of experiences in the provision of child rescue and treatment services.**

We propose to convene a Victim Services Roundtable that will include experts on the identification and treatment of victims to promote implementation of a victim-centric approach. A key element of this goal will be improving the recognition and identification of child victims, to ensure help for the massive numbers of hidden victims of abuse and exploitation in our Digital World.

**Goal 6: To promote appropriate legislation and executive measures**

Encourage the Authorities to act effectively, using appropriate legislation and executive measures to fully respect the rule of the law and due process, as well as encourage legislators to legislate laws appropriate to new digital, technological and social developments in order to counter criminal activities that harm children's lives and dignity.