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Centre for Child Protection



Child Dignity
in the Digital World

World Congress
October 3-6, 2017

Press release 3 October
Protect children in the digital world
Congress launches in Rome

Governments, experts and the Catholic Church came together today to pledge their support to develop a co-ordinated strategy to protect children in the digital world at the launch of the World Congress on Child Dignity in the Digital World, being held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

Keynote addresses by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Holy See Secretary of State and Baroness Joanna Shields, UK Special Representative for Internet Safety and founder of WeProtect, called for urgent action as the huge scale of the challenge has become so clear. This call followed formal welcomes to the 150 expert delegates from Fr Hans Zollner, President of the Centre for Child Protection, Fr Nuno da Silva Goncalves, rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Fr Arturo Sosa Abascal, superior general of the Society of Jesus, President Pietro Grasso, president of the Italian Senate and Minister Valeria Federico, Minister of Education.

Cardinal Parolin said: "We have a responsibility to children, as do the companies that promote and drive the development of the digital world. With its international, global and interdisciplinary perspective, this Congress must take responsibility for those minors at the world's peripheries, of which Pope Francis continually speaks: peripheries that are in geographic areas of greater economic poverty, but that are also found within wealthy societies where there is considerable human and spiritual poverty, loneliness and a loss of the meaning of life. It is not by chance that it is the minors in all of these peripheries who are the preferred target of networks of exploitation and of organised online violence on a global scale.

Child Dignity World Congress 2017

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"According to scripture, every human being is created "in the image and likeness" of God. The Son of God came among us as a vulnerable child, and in needy circumstances, assuming both the fragility and the hope for a future that are intrinsic to an infant. To disparage infancy and to abuse children is for the Christian, therefore, not only a crime but also - as Pope Francis has stated - sacrilege, a profanation of that which is sacred, of the presence of God in every human being."

Baroness Shields said: "Years from now, when history writes the chapter entitled "the digital world", will it celebrate the immense benefits that technology has delivered and the great human progress that followed? Or, will it be a requiem of regret for childhood lost? But this is not a time to despair. We have within our grasp the opportunity to shape the future and we must act.

"Every young life damaged as a result of the digital revolution is a tragedy. And when these lives are taken together, it's our collective failure.

"Pope Francis, in his recent TED talk, stated that the only future worth building includes everyone. I agree wholeheartedly, the only future worth building is one that protects everyone. There are times in life when how we act as a global community defines us. This is one of those times."

Fr Zollner said: "At this point in time no other group has the competence to address this challenge. This is a unique moment and a unique occasion as we ask how we can stop these digital terror attacks at the heart of the child. It is up to us to give our best answer to this question right now."

Following three days of expert input and workshops, the Congress concludes on Friday with a Papal Audience.

Ends

For further information go to www.childdignity2017.org or contact Alexander DesForges on 0044 (0)7983704097.

To watch the livestream of the conference go to www.childprotection.unigre.it
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