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Stop sexual abuse. To heal and protect.

13-15 November 2015, Poznań, Poland

Conference summary

This summary captures a two-day programme of discussions and presentations on child abuse by pedophile priests. It was the first, admission free and open to the general public, international conference devoted to this issue, organized by *Be Not Afraid Foundation*.

We hosted representatives from:

1. North America (Canada, United States, Mexico)
2. South America (Ecuador, Chile)
3. Australia
4. Africa (Senegal)
5. Europe (Ireland, United Kingdom, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and obviously from Poland)

The conference participants from around the world talked about their experiences and cases of sexual abuse they were familiar with, as well as about the consequent protocol of church leaders when dealing with those cases.

Sadly, despite having received our invitation, none of the Polish church representatives took part in the conference nor did we receive a response to the invitation or any explanation of their absence.

We learned that when dealing with victims and their families, perpetrators and their superiors all around the world follow the same protocol. Victims and their families are manipulated, and while perpetrators abuse children, they work hard on creating good image within the community. As for the priests' superiors, they always act surprised. Each case seems to be the first and only ever reported. Meanwhile, as it turns out, those cases have often already been reported to the bishop, sometimes even by the victims' friends. Therefore, perpetrators escape all responsibility and experience no consequence for their actions. In rare cases they are shifted to a different parish or diocese. Hardly ever are they removed from clerical state. American representatives, in particular, shared a number of their experiences due to the case of Diocese of Boston.

The speakers explained the process of pursuing their rights in different legal systems, and so we learned that in Canada there is no statute of limitation and perpetrators can be prosecuted even after a number of years. There is no need for victims to provide evidence of sexual abuse. Court takes into consideration the very possibility of crime having been committed in circumstances described by the victim. In the United States and the Netherlands church has started paying reparations to victims. In Spain, for instance, a number of demonstrations have been organized with picketers demanding an effective remedy for the problem.

The representative of *the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* explained the significance of the UN's 2014 *Report on Vatican Child Sexual Abuse*. Polish speakers pointed out a considerable success, that is the extension of limitation period in pedophile abuse cases. They also talked about criminal and civil law suits against priests and their superiors, as well as about social reception of such cases being reported.

There was unanimous agreement among participants on the necessity for further international cooperation in order to eliminate clergy sex crimes and cover ups.

Our sincere gratitude goes to the news media for their patronage, as well as their accurate and meaningful reporting of our conference. We were pleased to see so many people interested in the issue in Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Zamość.

Kind regards

Be Not Afraid Foundation