

The Declaration of Rome

World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World

6 October 2017

Summary

Pope Francis – “A society can be judged by the way it treats its children”

Holy Father, I am honored to present to you the Declaration of Rome, adopted by the participants in the first World Congress “Child Dignity in the Digital World,” convened this week at the Pontifical Gregorian University. I offer this historic document to you on behalf of millions of young people around the world who need information and far more protection from the risks of sexual and other forms of abuse on the internet.

Using your own words, we believe that -- “A society can be judged by the way it treats its children.”

Every child has a right to dignity and safety. Yet, millions of children are being abused and exploited all over the world. Technology, which has changed our lives in so many positive ways, is also being used in the growing exploitation of children.

Today, content that is increasingly extreme and dehumanizing is available literally at children’s fingertips. The proliferation of social media which has produced dramatic increases in communications has also resulted in cyberbullying, harassment and sextortion. Vast numbers of sexual abuse images of children and youth are available online and continue to grow unabated. Online pornography is impacting the malleable minds of young children.

We embrace the vision of an internet accessible by all people. However, we believe the constitution of this vision must recognize the unwavering value of protecting all children.

The challenges are enormous, but our response must not be gloom and dismay. We must work together to seek positive, empowering solutions for all. We must ensure that all children have safe access to the internet to enhance their education, communications and connections. Technology companies and governments must continue to innovate to better protect children. We must also awaken families, neighbours, communities around the world and children themselves to the reality of the internet’s impact upon children.

Important work is being done by the Centre for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University, by the WePROTECT Global Alliance which unites 70 nations, 23 technology companies and many international organizations in this mission, and by the UN Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. This is a problem that cannot be solved by one nation or one company or one faith acting alone, it is a global problem that

requires global solutions. It requires that we build awareness, and that we mobilize action from every government, every faith, every company and every institution.

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. For this reason this Declaration of Rome appeals to everyone to stand up for the protection of the dignity of children.