

## **World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World**

### **Strategic Plan**

#### **Implementing the Declaration of Rome**

**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.”

Pope Francis accepted the Declaration and said, *“in the Declaration you presented me, 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 that you have undertaken.”*

The challenge now is to implement those commitments. The task is enormous. We must maintain momentum, provide data to inform and shape policy, and generate the resources necessary for this comprehensive effort. The Centre for Child Protection (CCP) of the Pontifical Gregorian University in partnership with the WePROTECT Global Alliance and SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus will use the Declaration of Rome as a platform on which to build a coalition of the willing. That coalition will turn the general goals of the Declaration into global action.

During the World Congress attendees participated in ten parallel workshops in a search for new and innovative approaches and solutions. This Strategic Plan presents those solutions.

**The Mission:** To grow a global coalition of representatives from religions, governments, international organisations, the technology industry, academia and the research community, civil society and elsewhere, working together toward a common objective: defending the dignity of minors and vulnerable adults in the digital world.

**The Vision:** To create a digital world where children and vulnerable adults are respected and free to exercise their digital rights and are safe from exploitation and abuse.

**Pope Francis on the Congress’ stated commitments:** *“These include raising awareness of the gravity of the problems, enacting suitable legislation, overseeing developments in technology, identifying victims and prosecuting those guilty of crimes. They include 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. They also include fostering greater sensitivity*

*and providing moral formation, as well as continuing scientific research in all the fields associated with this challenge.”*

## **Executive Summary**

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 challenges are enormous. Recognizing the need for global dialogue and comprehensive action, in October 2017 the Centre for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the WePROTECT Global Alliance and SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus convened the World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World. The Congress brought together leaders from religion, science, civil society and government. The attendees adopted a call to action, “The Declaration of Rome.”

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.**”

**The Mission:** To grow a global coalition of representatives from religions, governments, international organisations, academia and the research community, civil society and elsewhere, working together toward a common objective: defending the dignity of minors and vulnerable adults in the digital world.

**The Vision:** To create a digital world where children and vulnerable adults are respected and free to exercise their digital rights and are safe from exploitation and abuse.

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

- Goal 1: To raise awareness of digital risks 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 revise applicable 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 Goals:**  
**(As stated in the Declaration of Rome)**

**Goal 1: To world leaders to undertake a global awareness campaign to educate and inform the people of the world about the severity and extent of the abuse and exploitation of the world’s children and young people and to urge them to demand action from national leaders.**

***Pope Francis: “...raising awareness of the gravity of the problems... 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.. as well as continuing scientific research in all the fields associated with this challenge.”***

**Awareness:**

Objective 1: To launch a global awareness campaign to elevate the fight against child abuse and exploitation and to make safeguarding the world’s children a priority on the policy agendas of world leaders and the leaders of every nation. Today, world leaders are confronted with a host of pressing challenges that occupy their time and attention. Safeguarding children must be one of them, and be included as a policy priority.

Objective 2: To establish and grow a true global coalition. This challenge is far larger than any one entity can manage. Thus, responsibility is often too diffused.

Objective 3: To launch a media outreach campaign to improve public understanding of this complex problem.

**Prevention & Safeguarding:**

Objective 4: – To make prevention the top priority. To coordinate a global safeguarding campaign including early intervention with potential offenders before they offend, and move beyond traditional “target hardening” and risk reduction approaches that place the burden on the child and family to recognise dangerous situations and avoid them. Utilising the public health model, our focus will be on primary prevention.

Objective 5: To call for the adoption of a wellness agenda for children. We must join forces with other health prevention programmes and identify core messages as part of this broader wellness agenda including not only internet-related risks but suicide prevention, bullying prevention, and building a positive self-image as well. We must appeal to the public's conscience.

Objective 6: To design and implement prevention and education programmes worldwide in cooperation with leading child protection organizations that focus on empowering children, families and communities.

Objective 7: To define our collective digital culture for the children of a digital age, a defined culture that the collective community accepts and agrees to abide by.

Objective 8: To define "what is a child." At the World Congress Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle called for a global effort and an effort in every nation and every culture to better understand "what is a child."

Objective 9: To advocate and promote the goals of digital citizenship: appropriate, responsible behavior, including digital access, communication, etiquette, law, rights and responsibilities, health, wellness and security.

Objective 10: To provide education to young people about appropriate sexual interactions and healthy relationships and provide training programmes for parents as the primary educators of their children.

Objective 11: To provide education programmes to young people that teach empathy, social skills and respectful behavior online.

Objective 12: To raise awareness of and promote suicide and self-harm prevention models like social media companies' trusted flagger program that encourage other users to help those appearing to be at risk.

### **Research:**

Objective 13: To convene leading researchers to undertake foundational research on the problem of child sexual abuse and exploitation, both online and offline.

Objective 14: To convene leading researchers to undertake research on the connections and the overlap between offline and online safety.

Objective 15: To convene leading researchers to develop consistent terminology and definitions. Researchers are calling for agreed definitions, validly-tested instruments and sampling standards and terminology that all sectors can apply uniformly.

Objective 16: To promote research on national, regional and global levels that will generate prevalence data on the true dimensions and extent of this problem, and will inform progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Objective 17: To mobilise leading researchers to address the apparent contradictions between the 20-year decline in confirmed cases of child sexual abuse and the explosion of child sexual abuse images online being reported by law enforcement and reporting/tracking organisations. To explore why there are such dramatic increases today and what this means regarding the actual incidence of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Objective 18: To promote interdisciplinary, intercultural research that is translated into practice. Today, research in this field is produced primarily in Europe and North America. Thus, many question whether the findings are relevant in all parts of the world.

Objective 17: To promote research to better understand the offenders who access child sexual abuse material and who among these offenders also engage in contact offending.

Objective 19: To promote international research on prevention, producing evidence regarding prevention programmes that work and those that do not. To ensure that prevention programmes are informed by science, are evaluated and proven to be successful.

Objective 20: To promote research to address gender disaggregation and to better understand how boys and girls are victimized.

Objective 21: To convene leading thinkers and researchers to address the question of “what is a child,” and seek greater global consensus across cultures and legal systems.

**Goal 2: To leaders of the world’s great religions to inform and mobilize members of every faith to join in a global movement to protect the world’s children.**

**Pope Francis: *“Very appropriately, you have expressed the hope that religious leaders and communities of believers can also share in this common effort, drawing on their experience, their authority and their resources for education and for moral and spiritual formation. In effect, only the light and the strength that come from God can enable us to face these new challenges.”***

Objective 1: To advocate a global, faith-based campaign to safeguard children. A 2010 study by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life reported that 84% of the world’s population is affiliated with a religion. If we are to mobilise communities around the world to better safeguard children, working together with leaders of all faiths is essential.

Objective 2: To convene a second World Congress focused on religious leaders. At the 2017 World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World, the government of the United Arab Emirates called for convening a follow-up World Congress that would bring together

leaders of the world's great religions in order to explore and develop a truly global, multi-faith campaign to safeguard the dignity and future of the world's children.

Objective 3: To engage moral and spiritual leaders worldwide in an effort to address the element of culture on this problem. This problem cannot be solved by law and law enforcement alone. To ensure sensitivity to cultural differences and work with cultural leaders and authorities.

Objective 4: To ensure that a religious institution's focus on family issues, defending life, addressing poverty and other issues includes discussion of child abuse and pornography.

Objective 5: To launch a global dialogue on the moral and ethical concerns raised by technological growth and its consequences. To discuss the appropriate limits of technology, particularly as they relate to safeguarding children.

Objective 6: To create a cross-platform Code of Conduct for the internet, including legal, ethical and moral guidelines as well as enforcement actions for those who violate the Code.

**Goal 3: To the parliaments of the world to improve their laws to better protect children and hold those accountable who sexually abuse and exploit children.**

**Pope Francis:** *"...include enacting suitable legislation...What is distinctive about the net is precisely that it is worldwide; it covers the planet, breaking down every barrier, becoming ever more pervasive, reaching everywhere and to every kind of user, including children, due to mobile devices that are becoming smaller and easier to use. As a result, today no one in the world, or any single national authority, feels capable of monitoring and adequately controlling the extent and growth of these phenomena."*

Objective 1: To examine evidence for the effectiveness of existing laws and facilitate the creation of model law addressing the key elements of the problem of child sexual abuse and exploitation online that should be included in the statutes of every nation. This model law will be disseminated to parliamentary leaders worldwide. A team of experts should be established to provide consultation and assistance to every nation.

Objective 2: To establish a process for the regular evaluation of the implementation and enforcement of laws on child sexual abuse and exploitation online.

Objective 3: Recognising that the internet is a global entity, but that our laws for addressing abuses and crimes via the internet are national laws, to examine and explore national jurisdiction to create more universal jurisdiction for certain crimes and offenses.

Objective 4: To explore creation of an international mechanism for regulating the digital world regarding illegal content and content that is harmful to children.

Objective 5: To explore creation of a global entity in the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation comparable to the Financial Action Task Force in Paris, created by the 1989 G7 to combat money laundering. Based on the FATF model, this new entity would work with governments worldwide to develop global standards for combating these crimes against children, creating more uniform and consistent policy worldwide.

Objective 6: To examine and reconsider statutory limitations that give technology companies immunity from civil lawsuits and criminal prosecution. To ensure that companies are protected from liability for what users do on their sites, but that these protections are not limitless and do not protect sites that knowingly, carelessly or recklessly engage in or facilitate unlawful activity which leads to children being harmed.

**Goal 4: To leaders of technology companies to commit to the development and implementation of new tools and technologies to attack the proliferation of sex abuse images on the Internet, and to interdict the redistribution of the images of identified child victims.**

**Pope Francis: “...include overseeing developments in technology...We rightly wonder if we are capable of guiding the processes we ourselves have set in motion, whether they might be escaping our grasp, and whether we are doing enough to keep them in check...We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral...”**

***The second mistaken approach would be to think that automatic technical solutions, filters devised by ever more refined algorithms in order to identify and block the spread of abusive and harmful images, are sufficient to deal with these problems. Certainly, such measures are necessary. Certainly, businesses that provide millions of people with social media and increasingly powerful, speedy and pervasive software should invest in this area a fair portion of their great profits. But there is also an urgent need, as part of the process of technological growth itself, for all those involved to acknowledge and address the ethical concerns that this growth raises, in all its breadth and its various consequences.”***

Objective 1: To call upon leading internet and social media companies to use more of their “great profits” to respond to and defend children from sexual exploitation and abuse and other dangers online. In the past companies have been called upon to bear the burden for or correct other social problems resulting from their industry; i.e., toxic spills, tobacco, food safety, etc. The creation and management of the digital world must bring with it the responsibility to bear the cost to the society in which it flourishes.

Objective 2: To call upon leading internet and social media companies to carve out a special area of the internet that is safe for children and that is separate from areas frequented and utilised by adults. If a quarter of internet users are children, it must be designed for them as a safe place to play and learn.

Objective 3: To explore innovative approaches to intervene with those searching for child sexual abuse material, including providing resources and directing them to help, thus countering the normalisation of criminal behavior and addressing the lack of help for young people who have unwittingly become addicted.

Objective 4: To call upon leading internet and social media companies to enhance their commitment to innovation in the area of child protection, creating new tools and technologies to help offset the use of other advanced technologies which are being used to harm children.

Objective 5: To challenge the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and VeriSign, the US company overseeing domain names to implement greater oversight and accountability over the assignment of domains. According to the latest report of the Internet Watch Foundation, 70% of child sexual abuse sites are found on the .com and .net domains. This situation suggests that oversight of the assignment of these domains is either lax or non-existent. Tighter controls must be implemented and accountability assured.

Objective 6: To expand the use of Microsoft's PhotoDNA and similar tools worldwide, dramatically increasing the number of participating companies and organisations. To expand the types of companies using PhotoDNA and similar tools to include photo storage companies and other entities.

**Goal 5: To world's ministries of public health and the leaders of non-governmental organizations to expand the rescue of child victims and improve treatment programs for victims of abuse and sexual exploitation.**

**Pope Francis: "...include assisting minors who have been affected."**

Objective 1: To urge implementation of a victim-centric approach, focusing on the needs and well-being of the child, young person or vulnerable adult. All who have been abused must be guaranteed end-to-end support to help them cope with their trauma and recover from the harm they have experienced. Risk assessments must be performed as soon as a victim is identified and a comprehensive plan to regain physical and emotional well-being must be provided.

Objective 2: To promote enhanced coordination and cooperation so that child-serving agencies and organizations overcome the traditional "silos" that limit information sharing. To create a multi-disciplinary approach to victim services.

**Goal 6: To government agencies, civil society and law enforcement to work to improve the recognition and identification of child victims, and ensure help for the massive numbers of hidden victims of child abuse and sexual exploitation.**

**Pope Francis:** *“We have to keep our eyes open and not hide from an unpleasant truth that we would rather not see. For that matter, surely we have realized sufficiently in recent years that concealing the reality of sexual abuse is a grave error and the source of many other evils? So let us face reality, as you have done in these days”.*

Objective 1: To spotlight global attention and mobilise worldwide support for the effort to identify and rescue children whose sexual abuse has been photographed and is being displayed and circulated worldwide via the internet. Far too few children whose abuse images are appearing on the internet are being identified and thus, far too few children are getting urgently needed help to prevent further abuse and provide therapeutic interventions. Governments, technology companies and other organisations around the world can and must help.

Objective 2: To engage leaders in many fields to ensure evidence-based, integrated and collaborative approaches to the provision of therapeutic assistance and treatment for the victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Most victims in the world today and their families do not receive any treatment or social intervention.

**Goal 7:** **To the world’s law enforcement organizations to expand regional and global cooperation in order to improve information sharing in investigations and increase collaborative efforts in addressing these crimes against children which cross national boundaries.**

**Pope Francis:** *“Here we find ourselves having to reckon with a third potentially mistaken approach, which consists in an ideological and mythical vision of the net as a realm of unlimited freedom... The net has opened a vast new forum for free expression and the exchange of ideas and information. This is certainly beneficial, but, as we have seen, it has also offered new means for engaging in heinous illicit activities, and... for the abuse of minors and offences against their dignity, for the corruption of their minds and violence against their bodies. This has nothing to do with the exercise of freedom; it has to do with crimes that need to be fought with intelligence and determination, through a broader cooperation among governments and law enforcement agencies on the global level, even as the net itself is now global”.*

Objective 1: To promote a comprehensive, coordinated global law enforcement effort to identify and rescue the victims in child sexual abuse material.

Objective 2: To promote the development and implementation of comprehensive capacity building in every nation for investigation and prosecution to ensure that all countries meet minimum standards.

Objective 3: To increase the investment in the development of new technology tools and the speed with which law enforcement is able to obtain and use them so that it can combat the illegal use of technology by offenders.

Objective 4: To develop new investigative tools to enable law enforcement to probe and investigate illegal activity in the “Dark Web,” the anonymous, unregulated internet. Recent research suggests that a grossly disproportionate share of dark web traffic involves child sexual abuse and exploitation images and material.

Objective 5: To advocate and promote regional and global cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of online child sexual abuse and exploitation. This is a global problem touching many countries that no single country or law enforcement agency can solve alone.

Objective 6: To research online approaches to raise awareness of the criminal origins of child pornography, to deter offenders from viewing child sexual abuse material, and to point them to therapeutic help for their own addiction.

Objective 7: To develop screening, treatment and rehabilitation services for offenders.

**Goal 8: To the world’s medical institutions to enhance training for medical professionals in recognizing the indicators of abuse and sexual exploitation, and improve the reporting and treatment of such abuse and sexual exploitation.**

**Pope Francis: *“including...in ways healthy for themselves and for other minors. From an educational standpoint too, we feel bewildered, because the speed of its growth has left the older generation on the sidelines, rendering extremely difficult, if not impossible, intergenerational dialogue and a serene transmission of rules and wisdom acquired by years of life and experience.”***

Objective 1: To promote the development and use of helplines and hotlines to encourage reporting of child sexual abuse. For 65% of children who contact helplines and other websites dedicated to the support of victims of abuse, this is the first time the child has spoken to anyone about his or her abuse, remembering that most children do not report abuse until adulthood.

Objective 2: To implement training for physicians and public health personnel which includes how to interview patients regarding abuse, evaluating risk factors, and identifying signs of abuse.

Objective 3: To develop and promote information on symptoms including behavioural and psychological symptoms or assessments that could predict sexually abusive behavior.

**Goal 9: To governments and private institutions to enhance resources available to psychiatric and other treatment professionals for expanded treatment and rehabilitation services for children who have been abused or exploited.**

Objective 1: To promote a roadmap for appropriate mental healthcare services. A possible model is the “CLICK: Path to Protection” in the UK, a training programme for all professionals working with child victims of online abuse.

Objective 2: To advocate worldwide for greater recognition of the reality that child sexual abuse is a major risk factor in the development of mental health problems affecting both the current and future well-being of victims, and that we must actively remove all barriers which delay disclosure. In light of the fact that most victims continue to be undetected, the roots of these mental health problems are often unrecognised. In many areas of the world child sexual abuse continues to be a problem that is often not spoken about.

**Goal 10: To the leading authorities in public health to expand research into the health impacts resulting from the exposure of young children and adolescents to graphic, extreme internet pornography.**

**Pope Francis:** *“The progress of neurobiology, psychology and psychiatry have brought to light the profound impact of violent and sexual images on the impressionable minds of children, the psychological problems that emerge as they grow older, the dependent behaviours and situations, and genuine enslavement that result from a steady diet of provocative or violent images. These problems will surely have a serious and life-long effect on today’s children... “The spread of ever more extreme pornography and other improper uses of the net not only causes disorders, dependencies and grave harm among adults, but also has a real impact on the way we view love and relations between the sexes. We would be seriously deluding ourselves were we to think that a society where an abnormal consumption of internet sex is rampant among adults could be capable of effectively protecting minors.”*

Objective 1: To undertake research into the effects of internet pornography on the developing brains of children and young people, both short and long-term. To examine the addictive nature of internet pornography on children, young people and adults.

Objective 2: To study the lessons from the effectiveness of the public health campaign against the harms of tobacco to inform and engage the public and public officials, and develop new campaigns to deter the use of pornography by young people and adults, and to signpost addicts to specialist sources of help.

**Goal 11: To leaders of the world’s governments, legislative bodies, private industry and religious institutions to advocate for and implement techniques to deny access by children and youth to internet content suitable only for adults.**

Objective 1: To advocate the adoption of laws and procedures worldwide which limit the access of children to internet pornography, including the United Kingdom's age verification law (Part III of the Digital Economy Act, enacted in April 2017), the default filtering protocols of Sky Broadband in the UK, and others.

Objective 2: To mandate all Internet Service Providers and telecommunications companies to filter content.

Objective 3: To companies which offer free WiFi to urge them to voluntarily filter inappropriate internet material since children and adolescents may use these locations as an alternative access point when their parents have installed internet filters at home.

Objective 4: To mobile phone companies, urge them to provide filtration capabilities embedded in their products.

**Goal 12: To governments, private industry and religious institutions to undertake a global awareness campaign directed at children and youth to educate them and provide them with the tools necessary to use the internet safely and responsibly, and to avoid the harm being done to many of their peers.**

**Pope Francis: *"We know that minors are presently more than a quarter of the over 3 billion users of the internet; this means that over 800 million minors are navigating the internet. We know that within two years, in India alone, over 500 million persons will have access to the internet, and that half of these will be minors. What do they find on the net? And how are they regarded by those who exercise various kinds of influence over the net?"***

Objective 1: To launch a global prevention campaign to empower children and give them the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe on the internet.

Objective 2: To develop guidelines for best practices and educational programmes on an international level, outlining recommendations for the private sector, families, education, law enforcement, and policy-making.

**Goal 13: To governments, private industry and religious institutions to undertake a global awareness initiative to make citizens in every country more alert and aware regarding the abuse and sexual exploitation of children, and to encourage them to report such abuse or exploitation to civil authorities if they see it, know about it or suspect it.**

Objective 1: To ensure that children are an integral part of the on-going discussion about their safety and help to shape child online safety policies.

Objective 2: To promote and emphasize the role of the family in protecting their children and maintaining healthy boundaries, and ensure that efforts are undertaken in every country and every culture to strengthen the family, preparing and constantly updating parents with the knowledge and skills they will need to help keep their children safe.

Objective 3: To promote the establishment of internet safeguarding hotlines and reporting mechanisms in every country.

Objective 4: To promote the role of the school and ensure training for school personnel in combatting child sexual exploitation online. For teachers, this is not just about abuse. Tech devices are keeping kids awake at night, causing them to arrive at school tired with low mood, preoccupied and anxious. Children must learn how to use technology wisely and appropriately, and to understand that the values we have offline are the same as our values online.

**Conclusion:** The Declaration of Rome “appeals to everyone to stand up for the protection of the dignity of children and young people.”