



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
On Violence against Children
16 March 2023

Mister President,

The Delegation of the Holy See takes note of the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children examining the specific threats to children that are posed by new technologies and participation in the digital environment.

While advances in technology can be a significant factor in promoting the rights of children, including through innovative forms of education and access to information, the threats that are posed to children in this context are just as significant.

The Holy See shares the concern of the Special Representative regarding the various and often interconnected forms of violence that occur online and offline. The problem of cyberbullying and harassment, exposure to violent and sexual content, promotion of suicide and self-harm, discrimination, trafficking, recruitment into criminal or armed groups, economic exploitation, fraud and identity theft are particularly worrying.

With the numerous global crises worldwide, including the COVID pandemic conflict and massive forced displacement, children are more exposed than ever to vulnerable situations in which normal protections and support are limited or unavailable. The Holy See is particularly concerned about the estimated millions of children who were exposed to sexual exploitation or abuse last year alone.¹

Mister President,

This Delegation affirms that in order to address the devastating findings of the report, it is necessary not only to provide a legal framework to penalize the illegal and immoral activity that has caused violence to children online, but also to adopt a proactive approach which seeks to prevent such activity in the future. Such an approach would need to involve the international community and national authorities, as well as the adoption by businesses and tech companies of appropriate regulations, ethical standards and oversight mechanisms.

Mister President,

While welcoming the Special Representative's call to involve children in the process of developing an adequate and holistic response to violence against children, the Holy See would like to emphasize the fundamental, sui generis role of parents and caregivers in this regard. Indeed, especially in the absence of adequate regulatory preventative frameworks and reparative responses, parents are the best placed to know the activities and needs of their children and to understand the full consequences of their choices online. Parents are also uniquely able to both protect the privacy of their children while protecting them from online violence. For this reason, in addition to providing children with adequate education with regard to their online activity, programs to help the digital literacy and awareness of cyber risks for parents and other caregivers could provide an important safeguard to prevent violence against children online.

Thank you, Mister President.

¹ Cfr. A/HRC/52/61, n. 54.