



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio,  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International  
Organizations in Geneva  
at the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Sale, Exploitation,  
and Sexual Abuse of Children  
Geneva, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

Mr. President,

Every child is a unique masterpiece created, treasured, and loved by God. For this reason, the sexual exploitation and abuse of children is a heinous violation of their dignity and, given their vulnerability, one that has devastating lifelong consequences.

My Delegation concurs with the Special Rapporteur that sexual exploitation of children, both within and outside the entertainment industry, is favoured by the lack of agreement on inviolable ethical principles, blurred lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, and the exposure of minors to content and lifestyles based on forms of self-fulfilment that objectify human beings and that trivialize personal relationships.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the dramatic growth of pornography in the digital world, widely accessible to minors via the internet, has lifelong effects on their psychology, generating addiction, violent behaviour and troubled emotional and sexual relationships.<sup>2</sup>

The Report rightly highlights the magnitude of the production and the dissemination of child sexual abuse material through the commercial online market. It has been reported, quite shockingly, that self-generated content accounts for over 70% of abusive on-line content. In that context, current attempts to legitimize self-generated materials because, according to some, they are not abusive, is particularly troubling. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, the minors' right to freedom of expression is not absolute, particularly when it endangers their physical and psychological health or exposes them to abuse.<sup>3</sup> Hence, greater efforts are required, including with the cooperation of content providers, to assist parents in fulfilling their primary responsibility to guide the psychological and spiritual growth of their children.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, multi-sectoral international cooperation between intelligence, police, and judicial authorities is essential to identify, target, and prosecute offenders and dismantling child pornography networks.

Thank you. Mr. President.

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, *Study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the entertainment industry*, A/HRC/55/55, § 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the congress on "Child Dignity in the Digital World"*, 14 November 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Special Rapporteur, *Op. Cit.* § 22.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Pope Francis, *Op. Cit.*