



- the spoken word -

Welcoming Speech
at the
Pontifical Gregorian University

Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig,
Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues

on the occasion of

The Discharge of the first diploma course
“Safeguarding of Minors”

Rome, 14 June 2016



**Dear Father François-Xavier Dumortier,
Your Excellency Annette Schavan,
Dear Father Hans Zollner,
Dear Team of the CCP,
Dear Diploma Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am delighted to be here in Rome today at the end of the Diploma course on the 'Safeguarding of Minors'.

I am extremely grateful to the Gregoriana for establishing this important course and very pleased that it will be continued in the future. Thank you to the diploma students for choosing to take this course. It is of particular interest for me to learn more about the subjects you have dealt with in your theses.

My aim today is to give you an overview of the work we do in Germany concerning both the inquiry and the prevention of sexual abuse.

Victims and survivors have broken their silence

In 2010, Germany was shaken to its core by an abuse scandal. The first cases took place at renowned educational institutions, including a Jesuit school in Berlin and a convent boarding school, run by the Benedictine order, in Ettal near Munich.

More and more victims and survivors have broken their silence and reported on abuse, which took place for example in their own family, at school, in sports clubs or in the church. The scandal of 2010 was a wake-up call for Germany and finally led to an intensive debate and the implementation of initial prevention measures.

In 2010, political and social responsibility was assumed on a national scale. The federal government reacted to the scandal by establishing a round table on child abuse with 66 experts from the fields of politics, science and research, many varied sectors of society and the Christian churches. Furthermore, the position of an Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues was created in the year of the scandal.



Ambassador Schavan was a Chair of the round table in her capacity as a member of the German federal government. Father Hans Zollner was a member of the important working group “research and education”. I know for a fact, that the idea of establishing the Center for Child Protection (CCP) was borne there.

Since 2010, many measures have been taken in Germany to support victims and survivors. We have introduced a telephone helpline, a website for support and set up several important research projects.

Organisations have put forward guidelines for the protection of minors

The round table made many important recommendations, such as improved support, better health care, better counselling of victims and better protection. The critical point here is that these recommendations did not become legally binding and still largely have not been implemented.

Many organisations have, however, put forward guidelines for the protection of minors. These include:

- The German Bishops Conference,
- the German Conference of Major Religious Superiors,
- the Lutheran Church in Germany,
- welfare organisations, such as the German Red Cross,
- the German Olympic Sports Confederation,
- the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education.

The greatest challenge for us is to ensure that all these recommendations are implemented. This has to happen on an enormous scale, because in Germany we have 50,000 kindergartens, 30,000 schools, 90,000 sports clubs and nearly 30,000 parishes.

Since 2010 we have taken many steps in the right direction and more and more specialised discussions have taken place. But we still have a long way to go because to this day, child abuse remains an inherent childhood risk.



In Germany, we have approximately 12,000 criminal cases of child abuse annually. There has been no evidence of a reduction in the number of cases since 2010. And now we even have new risks of sexual violence, for example, in refugee camps and as a result of digital media. According to the WHO, there are 18 million abused children living in Europe. Based on these figures, we can assume that there are one million abused children living in Germany. Sexually abused in their own family, in schools, in other institutions and within their peer groups.

It should be a matter of course that politicians and all those in a position of responsibility do everything in their power to protect girls and boys from sexual abuse and give them the best possible help and counselling. Unfortunately, what should be normal is not our reality in Germany. Investment in prevention is far too low. If nothing changes, we will not have a reduction in the number of cases in the foreseeable future.

International studies clearly demonstrate that only long-term prevention and legislative measures will lead to better protection and the number of cases will only decrease if protection is taken seriously in the long term.

All institutions and organisations need prevention concepts

It is well-known that sexual abuse does not happen unintentionally. It is usually a well-planned criminal act. Offenders plan their crimes down to the last detail, all over the world, in families, in institutions, basically anywhere where children are in the care of adults.

Only with clear structures, rules and basic knowledge of sexual abuse can criminal strategies and plans be foiled. In Germany and probably in the majority of countries around the world there is an absence of laws for the introduction of prevention concepts.

In Germany, only very few institutions have a prevention concept. Unfortunately, the willingness to develop such concepts usually only occurs when a case becomes known. There is often a great deal of insecurity concerning prevention concepts. You probably know this from your own work experience.

In 2012, I started to negotiate specific agreements with national organisations to motivate them to provide further protection within their own area of responsibility.



Three of the more than 20 organisations that I have partnership agreements with, are:

- The German Bishops Conference,
- the German Conference of Major Religious Superiors,
- the Caritas.

For prevention concepts to become part of everyday life, all institutions dealing with children must confront questions, such as:

- What has to happen so that nothing happens?
- How close is too close?
- How do we deal with an issue which is an issue for everyone?

Girls and boys who suffer sexual abuse urgently need a competent contact person who recognises the signs and knows what to do if a case of abuse is suspected.

Therefore, I initiated my campaign “No room for abuse”. With this campaign, we support and encourage institutions to introduce prevention concepts, for example in kindergartens and schools. For this purpose, we have designed a tool kit consisting of flyers, posters, a website and an online spot which explains how a prevention concept can be developed, as well as providing access to many other sources of information.

Typically, a prevention concept - as I see it - includes, for example, a code of behaviour, guidelines on the recruitment of staff, defining rules on how staff interact with minors whilst respecting their boundaries and training courses for staff.

The German Catholic Church supports this campaign in all its 27 dioceses. You can find further information @ www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de.

Schools are the main priority in preventing abuse

Let us take a quick look at schools which are my main priority when it comes to preventing abuse. Because it is here in schools that we can reach all girls and boys: But only a small number of schools in Germany have prevention concepts against sexual abuse.



Together with the 16 Ministers of Education of the German federal states, I would like to get heads of schools and their teams on board. They need to be aware that child protection and education go hand in hand. Children who suffer sexual abuse are at high risk of failing at school and active child protection has to be intensified.

We have almost finished developing our new project “School against Sexual Abuse”. Starting this summer we will provide all 30,000 schools in Germany with a tool kit helping them to develop their own prevention concepts.

New “Independent Commission to Investigate Child Sexual Abuse”

In addition to the prevention of abuse, the inquiry into child sexual abuse is also very important. This year we have established the “Independent Commission to Investigate Child Sexual Abuse” in Germany.

It was a long political struggle, but I am very happy to have appointed the seven members of the Commission, on a resolution by the German parliament and supported by the German government. The members have professional expertise in a range of disciplines, including law, history, social anthropology and psychology.

The Commission will empower victims and survivors and contemporary witnesses to speak out, acknowledge victims and survivors as people whose experiences deserve recognition, shed light on abuse in institutions, make recommendations on both better safeguarding of minors and institutional inquiry.

The Commission is the first worldwide which will investigate abuse not only in institutions but also in family settings. I expect all segments of society to co-operate fully with the Commission, including of course, the Catholic Church in Germany. I hope the inquiry panel will provide us with a more critical eye for ongoing risks and new challenges.

It is high time that abuse is seen by all parts of society as one of the worst crimes inflicted on minors, irrelevant of where the abuse occurs. Whether committed in a family, using webcam, by UN Blue Helmets, in refugee camps, in sports clubs or in Catholic schools.

Many thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you.



The commitment by the Gregorian University to give minors better protection from sexual abuse sends an important signal with a view to international exchange and networking.

Dear Diploma Students,

On returning to your home countries, I hope you will take with you a lot of new knowledge about the dangers of child sexual abuse. In addition, I am convinced that you will make an important contribution to the improvement of the protection of children in your own working environments.

I wish you all the best for your future and for the safeguarding of minors from sexual abuse. We all have to be aware of possible dangers and prepared to take on responsibility so that there is “no room for abuse”!

Thank you very much for your attention.