

Human rights report lists Vatican for
FAILURE TO PROTECT CHILDREN

VATICAN CITY -- Amnesty International named the Vatican in its annual report on human rights' concerns for not sufficiently complying with international mandates on protecting children from abuse.

It marked the first time the Vatican was named in the group's Annual Report on the state of human rights around the world. The 2011 Annual Report covered human rights in 157 countries, looking particularly at rights abuses and restrictions and at failures to implement international rights' agreements.

The report, released May 13, said, "The Holy See did not sufficiently comply with its international obligations relating to the protection of children," specifically regarding sex abuse.

The Vatican is party to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 19 of the convention says that states parties "shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse."

The article also says measures should be implemented to aid in prevention, reporting and investigation of abuse as well as care for victims and, "as appropriate," the involvement of the court system.

The Amnesty International report said, "Increasing evidence of widespread child sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy over the past decades, and of the enduring failure of the Catholic Church to address these crimes properly, continued to emerge in various countries."

"Such failure included not removing alleged perpetrators from their posts pending proper investigations, not cooperating with judicial authorities to bring them to justice and not ensuring proper reparation to victims," the report said.

The report recognized Pope Benedict XVI's efforts to combat the abuse of children by clergy and his call for better prevention programs, an improved selection process for priestly candidates and "just penalties," including removing abusers from ministry.

The report also mentioned the pope's pastoral letter to Irish Catholics in 2010 in which he called for an apostolic visitation to look at how abuse allegations and cases were handled.

The Amnesty report quoted the pope apologizing that "a misplaced concern for the reputation of the church and the avoidance of scandal" had ended in the "failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person."

The pope had called on bishops around the world to fully implement church norms concerning child abuse and to continue to cooperate with civil authorities, it said.

"Canon law does not include an obligation for church authorities to report cases to civil authorities for criminal investigation. Secrecy is mandatory throughout the proceedings," the Amnesty report said.

Vatican norms maintain the imposition of "pontifical secret" on the church's judicial handling of clerical sex abuse and other grave crimes, which means they are dealt with in strict confidentiality.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, has said that the provision on the secrecy of trials was designed "to protect the dignity of everyone involved."

The Vatican's policy is to encourage bishops to report such crimes wherever required by civil law, the spokesman has said.