

# SNAP's letter to the president of the UNITED NATIONS

April 14, 2008

SNAP

Survivors Network of those Abused By Priests  
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H.E. Srgjan Kerim  
President, United Nations General Assembly  
760 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. President Srgjan Kerim:

As survivors of childhood sexual abuse inflicted by Catholic clergy-priests, we must speak out about Pope Benedict's upcoming visit to the General Assembly. Under his leadership in the Vatican for the last 27 years - as Pope and formerly as head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith - thousands of predator priests have raped, sodomized and sexually brutalized thousands of children around the globe. The countless church officials who kept silent about the crimes - or actively concealed them - didn't lose their jobs or even face a reprimand. In some cases, the Vatican promoted them. In the United States, bishops developed new policies in 2002 in response to public pressure, but the old mind set and behaviors allowing children to be victimized continues.

Pope Benedict has treated pedophile priests as sinners in need of forgiveness rather than violent criminals who prey on the vulnerable. He's enabled serial predators to cross international borders to escape criminal prosecution and allowed many to continue in ministry with children. He's defrocked some priests, but more often he has refused to take action, resulting in the sexual victimization of even more children. He's exhibited gross irresponsibility and open disregard for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children have the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation.

As a signatory to the Convention, the pope recognizes that the Holy See is the "highest organ of government of the Catholic Church and a sovereign subject of international law." He also agreed to comply with all provisions of the Convention and uphold the basic human rights of children under the institutional care of the Catholic Church around the world.

The Holy See has not been in compliance with the Convention for 14 years, failing to meet UN reporting requirements since 1994. Even in 1994, the Holy See gave only a partial submission and failed to acknowledge any cases of clergy sexual abuse and its juridical handling of these cases. Yet, the Vatican and the Pope continue to claim the prestige that comes from support of the Convention and its endorsement by United Nations member states.

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## **Among the Holy See's violations of the Convention:**

1. Circumventing the reporting of child sex crimes to civil authorities and international law enforcement. A 2001 canon law directive from the Holy See, *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, requires that all criminal evidence of sex crimes against children by clergy be reported directly to the

Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which reports directly to the Pope. Through this directive, the Pope and/or his staff are aware of prosecutable evidence of global sex crimes by clergy, effectively circumventing reporting to civil authorities around the world, including international law enforcement agencies. (<http://www.bishop-accountability.org/resources/resource-files/churchdocs/SacramentorumAndNormaeEnglish.htm>)

2. Evidence suggests that the Holy See, through its vast network of diplomats and diplomatic personnel, have misused the diplomatic immunity of its officials to conceal information of child sex crimes by clergy, including international transport of documents containing direct criminal evidence of crimes by members of the clergy against children. (Auxiliary Bishop A. James Quinn of Cleveland suggested to church leaders in 1990 a way of hiding records of abusive priests in the Vatican embassy, which has diplomatic immunity: "If there's something you really don't want people to see you might send it off to the Apostolic Delegate, because they have immunity to protect something that is potentially dangerous," Quinn said. News report link: [http://www.mcgillbroadcast.com/news-archive/~A/America\\_General/\(2002-05-31\)-bishop\\_Caught\\_on\\_Tape\\_Suggesting.html](http://www.mcgillbroadcast.com/news-archive/~A/America_General/(2002-05-31)-bishop_Caught_on_Tape_Suggesting.html))

3. The widespread practice of bishops around the world is to secretly transfer known pedophile clergy across international boundaries without reporting to state criminal authorities for the purposes of thwarting criminal prosecution. (See attachment)

4. Church and court records in both civil and criminal cases show that repeatedly predator priests have taken children across national boundaries and assaulted. In few instances have church authorities willingly shared information about these crimes with appropriate criminal authorities in either nation. (See: US Dept of Justice, United States Attorney Release, 2 Nov 2007, Announcing charges against Jesuit Father Donald McGuire for transporting a child across international boundaries for the purpose of sexual abuse.)

Because of these violations, and others, we urge the United Nations to launch a full-scale investigation into the perpetuation of the sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church. It is an affront to human dignity that Pope Benedict enables the criminal sexual assault of children by priests while claiming to be a holy and divinely commissioned Vicar of Christ and supreme spokesman for God. In his speech to UN leaders, he will likely voice concern for human rights violations committed by others, yet fail to take responsibility for his culpability in the rape of children in the Catholic Church.

## **Who We Are**

Each of us signing this letter was sexually violated as a child by a Catholic priest. We know firsthand the crippling, lifelong impact of child rape by clergy. For most of us, the abuse could have been prevented. Church officials often knew about our predators' histories of sexual abuse, but refused to intervene. Instead, they shuttled the pedophiles from parish to parish where other children were brutalized. In some cases, the predators were given sanctuary in foreign lands, where they were permitted to work with children. The impact of the sexual abuse was so devastating that many of those children later committed suicide. Some of the priests, on the other hand, went on to become bishops.

We are leaders of SNAP, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, the world's largest, oldest and most active support group for women and men sexually abused by religious authority figures. Our nonsectarian, nonprofit organization formed 20 years ago.

When the church refused to help us or protect other children, we turned to one another for healing support and to break the silence about clergy sexual abuse. Today, the vast majority of our 8,000 members and support groups are in North America, with individual members from every continent on the planet.

## **Track Record of Pope Benedict XVI**

Prior to being elected in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI was known as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and served as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since 1981. As one of Pope John Paul's most trusted advisors, Cardinal Ratzinger's department was assigned to deal with allegations of child sexual abuse by priests. In that role, the cardinal was privy to details about abuse allegations against priests and the horrors of the sexual violence inflicted on children.

Cardinal Ratzinger reacted by minimizing or denying the abuse, shifting the blame away from the predator priests and the church officials who shielded them, pointing fingers at the child victims and their families, and attacking the media for reporting the clergy crimes and cover-ups by church officials. When the clergy sexual abuse crisis exploded in the United States in 2002, Cardinal Ratzinger blamed the scandals on an "intentional, manipulated...desire to discredit the church" ( ) by the media. While he has stated publicly that child abuse is wrong, he has privately fostered a church environment where predator priests continue to thrive.

In several documented cases of clergy sexual abuse submitted to Cardinal Ratzinger's department, he ignored the reports. In other cases, he took years to complete investigations, which were conducted in secrecy with no assurance of fairness, objectivity or a commitment to justice. One of the most notorious cases is that of the late Father Marciel Maciel Degollado, the founder of a religious order known as the Legion of Christ. In 1998, Cardinal Ratzinger's department received a report in which dozens of minors, including nine former seminarians, said the priest sexually abused them. The cardinal sat on the charges for years. Then two years ago, after much public outcry, he "invited" the priest to a live a life of penance. The cardinal refused to hold a church trial, strip the priest of his clerical status or impose any serious discipline.

Sadly, in our 20-year history we have not witnessed few cases in which church leaders acted appropriately in removing predator priests and assisting victims unless forced to do so by external sources. Church authorities often only act - and then minimally - in an effort to control bad publicity brought about because victims have spoken out, police and prosecutors have arrested predators or journalists have exposed the atrocities. Unfortunately, for most victims of clergy abuse, justice is never realized. Most predator priests are never arrested or spend time in prison, according to a study conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Law.

## **Affirmation of the Rights of the Child**

In September 1990, the Holy See acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing so, church officials agreed to protect and promote the rights of children around the world. But since then, endless news stories and court records have documented the prevalence of the sexual abuse of children by priests. In some dioceses, roughly 10 percent of the priests were predators. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops said in a report that at least 4 percent of U.S. priests abused children between 1950 and 2004. At least 25 percent of the friars at St. Anthony Seminary in the Los Angeles Archdiocese were child molesters, according to a study commissioned by the Franciscan religious order running the school, which has since closed.

In spite of the scale of the problem, the Vatican hasn't cracked down in any meaningful way and, in fact, continues to facilitate predator priests' access to children. Yet, Catholic officials, including Pope Benedict, speak out about human rights concerns for children facing starvation, violations of child

labor laws, children in war zones, refugee children, children denied access to education and other issues impacting children.

We have painfully learned that priests across the globe have been sexually abusing children for centuries. Catholic Church law instructs bishops to keep secret any allegations against priests. In 1962, the Vatican sent a letter to bishops instructing them on how to handle abuse allegations. The document, *Crimen Sollicitationis* ("The Crime of Soliciting"), was created in response to priests making sexual advances to children in confessional booths. The directives said that no one, not even the victim or parents of a victim, were permitted to disclose the abuse publicly under pain of excommunication. The mandate captured the harmful mindset of the Vatican that continues to this day.

In 2001, Pope John Paul II issued a new law - *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* - for dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse by priests. Bishops around the world were directed to report allegations of sexual abuse by priests to Cardinal Ratzinger's department. They were also instructed not to take further action without direction from Cardinal Ratzinger. To many these steps furthered the culture of secrecy within the church regarding predator priests.

Even with the intense public spotlight on the U.S. scandals since 2002, the Vatican acted minimally to stop the colossal epidemic of child sexual abuse by clergy around the globe. Pope Benedict has repeatedly blamed the media for the scandals. He's minimized the numbers of predators and refused to defrock many known serial clergy child molesters.

While many church leaders were aware of priests sexually abusing children, few reported the crimes to police. In fact, on occasions when priests were being questioned or investigated, church leaders pressured civil authorities not to file criminal charges. Church officials continue to put concern for their reputations above the safety of children. Even more astounding is that they treat victims of predator priests as enemies of the church rather than crime victims in need of compassion, support and justice. Victims who come forward are courageous and motivated by a desire to heal and protect other children. They are civil servants who are passionate about public safety.

We've enclosed an attachment citing a few of the many egregious actions by church leaders who enabled predator priests as well as examples of priests who evaded civil authorities. We ask that you not allow Pope Benedict or the Catholic Church to continue its flagrant violations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We urge you to act on behalf of the vulnerable Catholic children across the globe by escalating pressure on the Vatican through a United Nations investigation. Allowing predator priests to flourish under the guise of moral authority is heinous and must be stopped. The Vatican and Pope Benedict have demonstrated that the church is unwilling and unable to police itself, or enact strict measures of accountability among its leadership. Therefore, we implore you to please intercede on behalf of innocent children.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Barbara A. Blaine, David Clohessy, Peter Isely  
SNAP President, SNAP National Director, SNAP Midwest Director  
312 399 4747 314 566 9790 414 429 7259

cc:

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon  
United Nations

Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro  
Deputy Secretary-General  
United Nations

Louise Arbour  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms. Melita Gabric  
Minister Plenipotentiary  
(Human Rights, Gender, Dialogue among Civilizations, Third Committee)

Attachment: Apr 14, 2008

Letter to H.E. Srgjan Kerim President United Nations General Assembly

Examples of church leaders enabling criminal priests and priests evading prosecution:

**Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Los Angeles Archdiocese:** His subterfuge on clergy sexual abuse is extensive. In one case, he refused to disclose the whereabouts of a Filipino priest accused of raping and impregnating Rita Miller, a teenager. In another case, an aide of Mahony's tipped off Father Nicholas Aguilar that he was about to be arrested in time for the priest to flee to Mexico to escape prosecution. "The archdiocese facilitated his flight," Los Angeles prosecutor Janice Maurizi told the Dallas Morning News (Feb. 1, 2006).

**Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez of Honduras:** He's forcefully advocated against reporting predator priests to law enforcement. "For me, it would be a tragedy to reduce the role of a pastor to that of a cop," he said in 2002 as the U.S. scandals exploded." We are totally different, and I'd be prepared to go to jail rather than harm one of my priests. We must not forget that we are pastors, not agents of the FBI or CIA." Rodriguez has condemned journalists covering the scandal, likening them to Hitler and describing them as obsessed. (DMN Feb1, 2006)

**Bishop Angel San Casimiro of Costa Rica:** He met with the mother of a victim of Father Enrique Vasquez, whom the bishop told the Dallas Morning News (Feb. 1, 2006) admitted that he had molested the boy. Even so, the bishop urged the mother not to go to police, imploring her to be "a good Christian." The bishop then allowed Father Vásquez to cross international boundaries, traveling in Europe, Africa and the United States as a missionary.

**Father Joseph Henn:** Although indicted on charges of sexually abusing children in Arizona, he was permitted to reside comfortably in Rome, just outside Vatican walls, for several years while U.S. civil authorities battled to have him extradited. During this time church leaders allowed him to live comfortably in Rome.(DMN Aug 1, 2006)

**Father James Tully:** He lives in Vicenza with a religious order known as the Xaverian Missionary Fathers. In 1992, he pleaded "no contest" to criminal charges involving giving alcohol to minors and inappropriate touching. In 2004, when additional allegations were made against Tully, church leaders transferred him out of the country to Rome, rather than have him face his accusers. (DMN Sep 12, 2004 and please see Hand-outs.)

**Father Barry Bossa:** He pleaded guilty in 1974 to sexually abusing a 12-year-old boy. Even with knowledge of the conviction, church leaders allowed Bossa to be ordained a priest afterward. Almost immediately, Bossa continued his behavior of abusing boys and additional criminal charges were brought against him in 2003. He fled the country and moved into the religious community of the Pallottines, just outside of the Vatican. (DMN Sep 12, 2004)

**Father Frank Klep:** Although facing at least five separate charges of criminal sexual abuse of children in Australia, Klep was found working with children in Samoa in 2006. His religious community, the Salesians of Don Bosco, insisted that Klep had no contact or ministry with children, but the Dallas Morning News photographed Klep with children between the ages of 6 and 12. In 1994, Klep was convicted of abusing two students in the 1970. In 1998, additional charges were brought and a warrant for his arrest was issued.  
(DMN Sep 12, 2004)

**Father Yusuf Dominic:** The Pakistan native was arrested in 1996 in London for abusing two boys. While charges were pending, he was released on bond in order to be sent to a treatment facility. Instead, he fled and returned to Pakistan. Three years later, he was living in the United States and trying to find ministry work in dioceses in New York, Los Angeles and Brooklyn. He worked for awhile in the Archdiocese of Newark, before finding a haven in Italy, where he continued working as a priest with access to children. (DMN Jun 23 04)

**Father Marcial Maciel Degollardo:** Marciel, who founded a controversial, secretive world wide religious order involved in the education and training of children and youngsters around the world. Widely praised by Pope John Paul, Marciel was accused of sexually assaulting children for many decades without disciplinary action from the Vatican or reports to civil authorities in several countries. In 1978 and 1989 evidence of criminal behavior against children was transmitted secretly by diplomatic pouch to the Vatican through the nunciature in Washington, D.C.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/23/International/worldspecial2/23mexico.html> Over the years, the allegations against Father Maciel have been the subject of newspaper articles in The Hartford Courant <http://www.rickross.com/reference/loc/loc12.html> and The National Catholic Reporter, as well as an ABC television report and several books. The accusers sent letters to the pope by diplomatic pouch in 1978 and 1989.)

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### **Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests**

[www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org)

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### **One Response to “SNAP Letter to President, United Nations General Assembly”**

1. [Mike Sanicola](#) Says:  
[April 16, 2008 at 11:35 am](#)

Keep up the Good Fight! Thanks for helping these victims! Below - excerpt from my book...Chapter 2

“In a strange and parallel way, the clergy-laity relationship dynamic has stifled the spirit of God and suppressed the church of which Satan, our common enemy is blamed. The difference between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and today is that the destructive relationship is no longer fed by preventing people from reading the word of God in their own language, but through a warped perception of biblical leadership. Figuratively, the mote continues to keep many truth seekers distant from the church, they have been ‘burned’ in relationships by shepherds that were to protect them, feed them, nurse them to health, and search for them when they were lost.

Organized religion has repulsed and imprisoned people - confined them to their own homes when they could be fellowshiping with others who profess a common faith. The demonic relationship dynamic co-exist in the invisible spiritual and physical world disguised in religious robes and that in the name of God. "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. [14] And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. [15] It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) What's alarming, is that many, if not most 'clergy' members today are not aware of their predicament because, in their minds, they are abiding to a religious system that justifies their behavior. Many people in the ministry or have served in full-time ministry are damaged as well, more than we would like to admit. Difficult to admit because those damaged are confused and do not understand why are they hurting so much after serving and dedicating their lives to such a noble cause? The challenge and first step to recovery is to separate the 'noble cause' from the 'means' by which they operated."