

Concluding Remarks by Mr Mark Pellicano, Head of Safeguarding

Your Grace, Your Excellency, honorable members of parliament, colleagues, and partners in safeguarding,

As we conclude this first-ever safeguarding conference in Malta, allow me to pause and appreciate the significance of this moment. Today marks a milestone in a national journey that unites social services, civil society, and the Church in Malta around a shared and vital mission - the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

We came together not only because safeguarding is a topic of professional interest, but because safeguarding is a matter of human dignity, of justice, and indeed an expression of the Church's mission to manifest Christ's love. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, the crimes of sexual abuse betray the trust of the faithful, offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. As declared by Pope Leo 14th, there should be 'No tolerance for any form of abuse in the Church'.

We do this work in Malta not in isolation, but as part of a global Church that has recognised painful realities within the Church which has committed itself to conversion, transparency, accountability, and prevention. And today, in Malta, we continue building that culture together.

Safeguarding is rooted in the belief, so clearly expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*, that “the human person deserves to be preserved, and that the human society deserves to be renewed”, The document emphasises that each person's dignity “is rooted and perfected in God” and therefore every individual is worthy of profound respect.”

This principle is echoed in Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which affirms that “human dignity is inviolable and must be respected and protected”. With particular regard to minors, the Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act under the Laws of Malta further asserts that every child has the right to grow up in a positive and safe environment, where they can develop a nurturing and supportive relationship with their caregivers.

Hence, human dignity is not negotiable. It is the foundation of every safeguarding measure we take, every training session we deliver, every policy we develop and every encounter we have with victims and survivors.

This shared understanding is what allows our safeguarding work in Malta to remain harmonised with both the Holy See and the national statutory authorities.

We also draw strength from the words of Jesus himself: “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.*” He did not merely welcome children. He defended them. Thus, our duty, is not only to respond when harm occurs, but to actively create environments where harm cannot take root. That is why we consider Safeguarding as discipleship in action.

In the past years, the Church in Malta has invested greatly in this mission. We have listened to the victims and survivors, we took note of what the professionals working in the social and

legal field told us, we learned, reformed, and built together a structure that is there for those who were voiceless and afraid to speak out.

For this reason, the Safeguarding Commission is founded on four pillars that shape every action we take, namely by delivering training and supporting entities to take preventive measures; providing care and advocacy for victims and survivors; carrying out thorough risk assessments of the reports we receive; and offering structured support for Church authorities to help ensure that the wellbeing of the subject of complaint is maintained.

Our work within the safeguarding commission is led according to the living experience of those who approach us. When a person discloses with us a painful story, sometimes even after years of silence, we accompany them. We ensure they are listened to with respect, referred and accompanied to specialised support services, and empowered in their healing. Our work reflects the heart of Canon Law, which emphasises the *salus animarum*, the salvation and wellbeing of souls (Canon 1752).

When we train educators, catechists, clergy, volunteers, and lay leaders, we aim to embed safeguarding from a policy to a culture lived in every parish hall, every youth group, every care home, and every missionary setting. We aim to change mindsets and to shift cultures.

When reports are made, we investigate carefully, applying both civil law and canon law obligations. Whenever we receive a referral which indicates that a minor is involved, we instantly refer the case to the Child Protection Directorate, ensuring full collaboration with State authorities. When vulnerable adults are involved as victims, we empower them to take all the legal measures that are available to them.

When we look into an allegation, we apply what has been clearly noted in the reforms to Book 6 of the Code of Canon Law, promulgated by Pope Francis in 2021, which strengthened penal norms for safeguarding, in a way that ensuring clarity, consistency, and accountability. Our processes reflect this legal evolution based on the principles of being always respectful, always fair, impartial and transparent.

Beyond case work, we are developing long-lasting frameworks and processes that strengthen safeguarding across the Church.

We are collaborating with the University of Malta to introduce formal study units in safeguarding, because our future professional workers, educators, clergy, and pastoral workers deserve training rooted in evidence, ethics, and best practice.

We are strengthening our digital and public presence because we believe that awareness is prevention. When a parent sees a safeguarding poster, when a teenager reads a leaflet, when a volunteer attends a session, and when a person that provides a service within the church sees our safeguarding structures, we hope that the likelihood of harm decreases. Through the preventive measures we take, safeguarding becomes visible, accessible, and normalised as it should be.

We are also sharing our knowledge and expertise with various NGOs and other faith communities. Safeguarding is not a competitive field. It is a shared mission. The child in a

sports club, the youth in a parish group, the teenager studying arts, the elderly person in a social club and the widow in a support group are the same people we serve in different contexts within our society and within the Church.

We are currently also collaborating and supporting other dioceses to draft their own safeguarding policies and to set up their own safeguarding structures. A delegation from the Safeguarding Commission of the Archdiocese of Kaunas, in Lithuania came to Malta for a study visit to help them set up a Safeguarding Commission. Meetings are also being held with the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Tirana-Durres in Albania to help them set up a Safeguarding Commission.

Through these exchanges, Malta is not only learning but also contributing, sharing its journey, its lessons, and its developing expertise with the wider Church.

Whilst we were setting up our Safeguarding Commission we received a lot of help and support from various dioceses around the world, mainly from Ireland and Australia. It is now our time to support other dioceses and to contribute to the wellbeing of victims and survivors within the global Church.

Each year, the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome invites us to deliver lectures and workshops to their Safeguarding Master's students on how to develop safeguarding policies and codes of conduct. We also offer placement opportunities, with the Pontifical Gregorian University regularly sends Masters students to complete their practicum at the Safeguarding Commission in Malta.

Such cooperation demonstrates that safeguarding has become a field of shared wisdom rather than isolated practice, a language the global Church now speaks together.

Currently we are revising the Church's national safeguarding policy to ensure that it reflects evolving realities, social expectations, and the Holy See's guidance, including *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, the Motu Proprio *Come Una Madre Amorevole*, and the principles and guidelines promoted by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. We are looking into the positive aspects of AI and how such applications can cultivate a behaviour that can be of risk towards minors and vulnerable adults.

Most importantly, we continue to build bridges with civil society and formalising cooperation with agencies such as the Victim Support Agency where we are currently working on a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that victims and survivors receive coordinated and holistic support.

This progress is possible only through strong leadership, collaboration, and trust. For this, we express our deep gratitude to His Grace Archbishop Charles Scicluna, whose internationally recognised expertise in safeguarding strengthens our work and inspires us to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, guided by his wisdom and experience in this field.

We are also grateful to Mr Pace Ross, who has fully embraced the mission of the Safeguarding Commission and integrated it into the wider mission of the Archdiocese of Malta. Through the

Archdiocese, we continue to receive invaluable support in our recruitment processes and other matters related to human resources and employment.

We express our gratitude to Fr Eric Cauchi, whose leadership at the Conference of Religious Major Superiors has brought renewed energy and focus to safeguarding within the Religious Orders and Congregations in Malta. His ongoing encouragement strengthens our efforts and enables us to work more effectively for the benefit of victims and survivors.

It has also been a great pleasure to welcome Fr Giovanni Curmi the Vicar General of the Diocese of Gozo, as a speaker at this Safeguarding Conference. His presence reflects the strong commitment of both dioceses to work together in a spirit of collaboration, ensuring that our safeguarding efforts are delivered with the highest level of professionalism and remain centred on the dignity and well-being of each person.

A heartfelt thanks goes to His Excellency Bishop Ali Herrera, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and today's keynote speaker. Bishop Ali Herrera has always given us his time and attention, offering guidance as we continue our safeguarding journey. Just a few days ago, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors published its Annual Report, which included its review of the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Safeguarding Commission. We are deeply honoured that the report recognises the guidelines adopted by the Church in Malta and Gozo as exemplary and aligned with the Universal Guidelines Framework. The Pontifical Commission has even encouraged other episcopal conferences to look to these guidelines as a model of good practice.

We also thank every panelist, every speaker, and every participant here. Your insights, your questions and your presence reflect your collaborative determination to create new ways on how safeguarding can become more effective, and together we shape action.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the victims and survivors with whom we work. Your experiences, and the pain you carry as a result of harm inflicted by those you trusted in moments of vulnerability, remain profoundly unjust and without justification. Yet your courage in sharing your stories inspires us, strengthens our work, and motivates us to work steadfastly and tirelessly.

I wish to express heartfelt thanks to the entire office team of the Safeguarding Commission, whose professionalism, discretion, and daily commitment sustain everything we do behind the scenes. I also wish to thank Peter Farrugia for his highly professional organization of this conference.

I extend deep gratitude to the Safeguarding Advisory Board, whose independent guidance and oversight strengthen our credibility and our practice. We are especially honoured that the Chair, Dr Natalie Kenely, is with us today.

Our primary objective remains ensuring that the Church in Malta addresses safeguarding matters as effectively as possible. Through the recommendations of the Safeguarding Advisory Board and the decisions of the Archbishop and the Provincials, restrictions are sometimes put in place. The challenge arises, however, when individuals subject to these restrictions engage with organisations outside the Church. In such cases, the same potential risks persist within

those new environments, yet, due to the absence of legal mechanisms that permit us to share information beyond Church structures, these risks are not being alarmed to the entities outside the Church. The same situation would occur if a safeguarding commission of a social entity outside the Church restricts an individual who is then engaged within the Church. Without sharing of such vital information between social entities, risks remain in place.

We believe that the establishment of a governmental Directorate for Safeguarding would provide an effective solution. This directorate could be able to audit and support social entities across Malta and Gozo ensuring that robust and consistent safeguarding practices are consistently implemented.

We leave here with renewed commitment. With conviction and with hope grounded in action and accountability.

Safeguarding grows strongest when it is harmonised, when our laws, our hearts, and our institutions move in the same rhythm of care.

Let us carry that conviction forward with humility, wisdom, courage, and compassion to a safer and better future

Thank you.