

Abuse summit followup to include new child protection law for Vatican

A Vatican spokesman said Sunday that concrete follow-up to this week's abuse summit will include a new law on child protection for Vatican City State and a document from Pope Francis.

At the conclusion of the Vatican's sex abuse and child protection summit Feb. 24, conference moderator Fr. Federico Lombardi, SJ, announced that Pope Francis will soon issue a *motu proprio* "on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons."

Vatican City State will also receive its own new child protection law and the Vicariate of Vatican City will receive new child protection guidelines in the coming weeks. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will publish a "vademecum," or handbook, with the tasks and obligations of bishops, Lombardi said, according to a Catholic News Agency report.

Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the CDF and a leading figure in the abuse conference, said Feb. 24 that while changes in law are good, the most important thing is "a change of heart" and conversion, "to be more like the Good Shepherd, taking care of the little ones and the most vulnerable."

Another measure slated to take place over the next months is the creation of task forces specifically to help local Churches in need of help to solve problems and develop initiatives in their bishops' conferences and dioceses.

Fr. Hans Zollner, SJ, summit organizer, said the reason behind the task force idea is that some countries the Church, and society overall, lack trained personnel and need outside assistance.

The task forces would help bishops' conferences and dioceses that have requested help on things like writing guidelines and education about abuse. "This is something that in the mid- and long-term will [bear] fruit," Zollner commented.

At the final press conference of the abuse summit, organizers re-emphasized the plan for a follow-up meeting to take place between summit leaders and top people in the Roman Curia first thing Monday morning.

The Feb. 25 meeting will be the first of a series of follow-ups to discuss what should come next, Lombardi said.

Zollner said they have tried to bring out some concrete outcomes from the week's encounter, but that they will "need to be fleshed out." He also said there are a number of other points and suggestions which came out of the bishops' working groups, and which organizers will be discussing.

Implementation of any concrete measures will have to take place at the local level, Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay said.

Gracias and Scicluna both agreed that one point worth looking into in the follow-up is the amendment of the "pontifical secret," a policy of confidentiality in the Church, regarding cases of sexual abuse of minors.

Scicluna praised the four-day meeting with heads of bishops' conferences, Eastern Catholic Churches, and religious communities, saying that while the Church has acknowledged for decades the seriousness of the crime of abuse of minors by clergy, this was the first time he had seen an equally clear acknowledgment of the gravity of cover-up.