

World Congress

Child Dignity in the Digital World

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Most Holy Father,

I thank you warmly for the graciousness with which you have agreed to receive in this audience the participants of the International Congress on Child Dignity in the Digital World. This initiative of the Centre for the Protection of Minors of the Pontifical Gregorian University, with the active and indispensable collaboration of various partners and supporters, is the expression of our profound commitment to the defence of the dignity of minors, especially in the field of information and communications.

We are happy to have been able to include in our discussions of the last three days, experts of the highest degree coming from many different areas: representatives from the fields of the university, politics, religion, technology companies, security forces and various organizations from civil society.

Digital technologies have broken down borders, making communication immediate, bringing us closer together and allowing us to care for one another. Yet there are also occasions of exploitation and offences against the dignity of the weakest and most defenceless and, in a particular way, with regard to minors.

Facing the challenges of the digital world that does not recognize borders and in situations where the Law seems impotent, international and inter-disciplinary collaboration is indispensable for the uncompromising defence of the dignity of minors. We are confident that we have taken an important step in this process of collaboration, which it is our firm intention to deepen and develop.

We are encouraged, Your Holiness, by your actions and your words in defence of children, afflicted by so many evils, such as war and poverty; but also exposed to the new challenges of the digital age – as, for example, the various forms of sexual exploitation. Personally, I was struck by the words you used in the letter addressed to Bishops on December 28th 2016, the feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs. On that occasion, you appealed to the “courage that generates processes capable of acknowledging the reality that many of our children are experiencing today” and called for efforts “to ensure them the bare minimum

needed so that their dignity as God's children will not only be respected but, above all, defended." And you added this appeal: "Let us not allow them to be robbed of joy." This is precisely our commitment.

Now, Your Holiness, we ask to be able to present you with a document which we have called the "Declaration of Rome," and for which we ask your support and prayer. It will be presented by a young woman, who represents the generations that are growing up with the new media. The Declaration was prepared on the occasion of our Congress, was adopted by the participants and intends to express our common commitment that the world – including the digital world – should be safer for minors and for all. After this presentation, we will be very pleased to hear that which you have to say to us and to receive your Blessing.

Vatican City, 6 October 2017

Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, S.J.

Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University