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Archbp. Martin comments on Vatican response to Irish gov't

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Immediate

Comments of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin on the response of the Holy See to the Government of Ireland

The Vatican response to the Irish government is detailed and comprehensive. It is serious, sober in tone and it addresses broader questions of Church policy on child safeguarding.

My hope is that it will be understood and received as such and not be an occasion just for added polemics. Polemics really do very little for the protection of children and the support of survivors.

Honest cooperation between Church and State on child safeguarding issues is particularly important in this country where the Church still plays an important role in communities. The primary role and responsibility of the State in ensuring the protection of children must, however, be unambiguously recognised by all.

I was quite struck, however, in reading the section of the Holy See?s response dealing with the evolution of the policies of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith over the past ten years, that on over twenty occasions these documents mention cooperation between Church and State and the need for the Church to respect national laws on the reporting of abuse cases.

I would like to comment on a number of specific issues.

Much emphasis is placed on an intervention by Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos in 1997. I would say two things on that 1997 document:

Effectively, if you look at it, the intervention did not in fact impede the Irish Bishops in unanimously approving the Framework Document, in applying it and in consistently developing that framework into the current positions of the Irish Church. The current Standards and Guidance documents have the full support of Pope Benedict XVI as was stated in his Letter to Irish Catholics and are described in the Cloyne Report as ?high standards which, if fully implemented, would afford proper protection to children?.

It was said that the intervention of Cardinal Castrillon gave some people the opportunity to brush aside the Framework Document. But the fact is that these same people who were prepared to brush aside the Framework Document, continued to reject the clear norms approved by Pope Benedict when they were published. They were people who regarded only their own views and would take no note of study documents, of Framework Documents or even of approved papal norms. These people may be few but the damage they caused was huge.

This brings us back to a central point which is implicit in the Cloyne Reports phrase ?if fully implemented?: even the best norms in the world must be accompanied by an on-going process of independent monitoring and

reviewing of day-to-day practice. Within the Catholic Church this is being undertaken by the National Board for the Safeguarding of Children. Its reviews are underway and will be published. The primary responsibility for monitoring child safeguarding measures in any dimension of Irish society belongs ? I repeat ? with the State.

One of the key points of the Taoiseach?s intervention was the assertion that ?the Holy See attempted to frustrate an enquiry in a sovereign democratic republic as little as three years ago not three decades ago?. There is no evidence presented in the Murphy Report to substantiate this, the Holy See could find no evidence and the Department of An Taoiseach?s office said that the Taoiseach was not referring to any specific event. This merits explanation.

Similarly the Holy See rightly rejects the use of a text of Cardinal Ratzinger which was made in a totally different context and had no relevance to the question of public policy.

The document addressed an issue which was discussed over recent years concerning the alleged refusal of the Holy See to grant a recognitio to the 1996 Framework Document. The Vatican response shows that the Irish Bishops preferred not to have such recognitio and never initiated the canonical procedures which such a recognitio required.

Where do we go from here? We are at a crucial moment regarding the future of child safeguarding in Ireland. Reading the Vatican report on the discussion of mandatory reporting that took place over fifteen years ago, one of my fears is that the same elements who had reservations then, and not just in the Church, may well reappear today.

This government is the first government in Irish history to dedicate a full cabinet ministry to children?s issues. This augurs well for the future. We need that future to be framed within a climate of cooperation on all sides.

The time has long since past to talk about child protection issues only in the future tense. Ireland owes it to survivors and to children to make this new juncture a real changing point.

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