



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with members of the “Meter” Association

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Meter” Association

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

I am pleased to meet with you, representatives of the “Meter” Association, which ever since 1989 - when few spoke of this scourge - has been engaged in the fight against paedophilia in Italy and in other countries. I greet and thank Msgr. Antonio Staglianò and Don Fortunato Di Noto, who founded this important body. And I greet and thank Cardinal Paolo Lojudice, and those who in various ways support the Association, which protects and defends abused and mistreated children.

In these years, with your generous work, you have contributed to rendering visible the Church’s love for the smallest and most helpless. How often, like the good Samaritan of the Gospel, have you drawn close with respect and compassion to welcome, console and protect! Closeness, compassion and tenderness: it is the style of God. How many spiritual wounds have you bound! The ecclesial community is grateful to you for all this.

We may compare your Association to a home. When I say “home”, I think of a place of welcome, of shelter, of guardianship. The word “home” has a typically family flavour, that evokes the warmth, affection, and tenderness that one may indeed experience in a family, especially in moments of anguish and pain. And you have been, and are, a home for many children whose innocence has been violated and who have been enslaved by the selfishness of adults. You have been and you are a house of hope, promoting in many victims a path of liberation and redemption. I therefore encourage you to continue this worthy social and human activity, continuing to offer your valuable contribution in the service of the protection of childhood.

Your work is more necessary than ever since, unfortunately, the abuse of children continues. I am referring in

particular to the grooming that takes place via the internet and the various social media, with pages and portals dedicated to child pornography. This is a scourge that, on the one hand, needs to be tackled with renewed determination by public institutions and the authorities, and on the other, requires an even greater awareness on the part of families and the various educational agencies. Even today we see how often in families the first reaction is to cover everything up, a first reaction that is always present in other institutions, and in the Church too. We must fight against this old habit of covering up. I know that you are always vigilant in protecting children even in the context of the most modern communications media.

Child abuse is a kind of “psychological murder” and in many cases an erasure of childhood. The protection of children against sexual exploitation is therefore a duty of all States, which must identify both traffickers and abusers. At the same time, it is a duty to denounce and prevent child abuse in the various spheres of society: schools, sports, recreational and cultural institutions, religious communities and individuals. In addition, in the field of child protection and the fight against paedophilia, specific measures must be taken to provide effective assistance to victims.

On all these fronts, Meter actively cooperates with institutional bodies and with various sectors of civil society, also through appropriate protocols of understanding. Continue your work without hesitation, paying particular attention to the educational aspect, to form a strong conscience in people and eradicate the culture of abuse and exploitation.

The logo of your Association is made up of a large letter "M" which recalls the idea of a maternal womb, welcome, protection and embracing the little ones. Inside the 'M' are twelve stars, the symbol of the crown of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and mother of all children. She, a caring mother, committed to loving her Son Jesus, is a model and guide for the whole Association, encouraging us to love with evangelical charity the children who are victims of slavery and violence. Charity towards our neighbour is inseparable from the love that God has for us and that we have for Him. This is why I urge you always to root your daily activity in your daily relationship with God: in personal and community prayer, in listening to His Word and above all in the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and bond of charity.

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew my appreciation and gratitude to the leaders, members, volunteers and all those who cooperate with your Association. Do not be afraid in the face of misunderstandings and difficulties; there are many, but do not be afraid. Go forward with courage and perseverance. I accompany you with my prayer and also with my blessing. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
