



Today, a UN panel in Geneva has begun hearing a report by Vatican officials on the sexual abuse of thousands of children by Roman Catholic clergy.

The Holy See is a signatory to the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) , a legally binding instrument which commits it to protecting and nurturing the most vulnerable in society.

The Holy See ratified the convention in 1990 and submitted a first implementation report in 1994. However, it did not provide progress reports for almost ten years, and only submitted one in 2012 after receiving a storm of criticism following the revelations in 2010 of child sex abuse cases in Europe and beyond, the Associated Press has reported.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) is expected to ask wide-ranging questions, forcing the Holy See to defend itself in public for the first time. It faces allegations that it enabled the sexual abuse of thousands of children by protecting paedophile priests at the expense of victims.

Last July, the UN Committee requested detailed information on all cases of abuse reported to the Vatican since 1995, a number the Vatican has acknowledged is over 4,000.

The questions included whether priests, nuns and monks guilty of sexual crime were allowed to remain in contact with children, what legal action had been taken against them, and whether complainants were silenced.

In its response, the Holy See said it was not its practice to disclose information about the religious discipline of clergy unless specifically requested to by the authorities in the country where they were serving.

Victims groups and human rights organisations have since rallied together to call for the UN committee to challenge the Holy See on its abuse failures, providing written testimony from victims and evidence outlining the global scale of the problem.

The Vatican declined to provide information and did not answer many of the committee's questions, arguing that it was not responsible for the actions of every Catholic, much less every priest or parish in the world.

Instead, it said it is really only responsible for implementing the UN treaty where it exercises territorial control: the 44 hectares (110 acres) of the Vatican City State in downtown Rome, where 31 children currently live.

Source: BBC, The Independent