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Statement of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

Vatican City, 4 March 2016 – The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors today issued the following press statement:

"Over the past two days, Fr. Hans Zollner SJ, a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, met in two occasions with David Ridsdale, Andrew Collins and Peter Blenkiron, victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse from Ballarat, Australia, who have come to Rome for Cardinal George Pell's hearing by the Royal Commission. Cardinal Pell had asked to arrange this meeting after these gentlemen requested to meet with a member of the Pontifical Commission. These gentlemen explained the reason for wanting to meet with a member of the Pontifical Commission is that, 'We would like to discuss ideas we have had about healing and the future to protect children from institutional abuse. We know this problem had been wider than the Catholic Church but our experiences have been in this environment. We are keen to develop links with your group as it is a world-wide issue'.

The victims/survivors spoke of models of educating children, parents and teachers so as to effect structural change within the Church and society concerning the effective safeguarding of children and adolescents. This discussion comes at a time when the Pontifical Commission decided at their 2016 February Plenary Assembly to have one strategic focus on safeguarding of minors in Catholic schools at their September 2016 Assembly.

Fr. Hans appreciated very much the victims'/survivors' concerns and their proposals for preventive measures, and he will report back to the other members of the Pontifical Commission, so that all can learn from the victims'/survivors' experience to improve the Commission's work in healing in the present, and better understand how to prevent sexual abuse by those in service to the Church from happening again in the future.

During the meeting, Fr. Hans explained to the victims/survivors the purpose of the Commission and also talked, in particular, about his work and initiatives in prevention from abuse within and outside the Church as President of the 'Centre for Child Protection' of the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University. The Ballarat survivors met also with some of the students of the Diploma-programme in Safeguarding of Minors, offered at the Gregorian University.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors was created by Pope Francis in March of 2014. The Chirograph of His Holiness Pope Francis states specifically, 'The Commission's specific task is to propose to me the most opportune initiatives for protecting minors and vulnerable adults, in order that we may do everything possible to ensure that crimes such as those which have occurred are no longer repeated in the Church. The Commission is to promote local responsibility in the particular Churches, uniting their efforts to those of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the protection of all children and vulnerable adults'.
