

Safe Environment Protocols

World Catholic Association for Communications (SIGNIS)

INTRODUCTION

The following protocols of the safe environment program of the World Catholic Association for Communications ("SIGNIS World") govern the practices of employees, volunteers, and elected officials in fulfillment of the guidelines given by the Holy Father through the Holy See's [Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors](#).

"All of us," Pope Francis states in his motu proprio [Vos Estis Lux Mundi](#), "are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationships with others ... The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the church's mission."

The primary goal of these policies is to provide a safe environment for our children by preventing the opportunity for the abuse of minors. These protocols provide a framework for SIGNIS World to cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators and community organizations to make and maintain a safe environment for children and vulnerable persons.

SIGNIS

*World Catholic Association
for Communication*

Rue de l'Industrie, 10 1000 Brussels - BELGIUM
sg@signis.net

www.signis.net

Facebook.com/signisworld

Twitter@SIGNIS

DEFINITIONS

Abuse

SIGNIS World is committed to the prevention of abuse of minors. For purposes of this protocol, abuse refers to physical and emotional abuse inflicted on a minor, other than by accidental means, as well as all forms of sexual abuse, including child pornography.

Adult

For the purpose of this protocol, "adult" includes anyone 18 years old and not a student in an elementary or secondary school.

Minor and Vulnerable Person

For the purpose of this protocol, any person under 18 years of age is a minor. The term "minor" also applies to any person who is significantly impaired in the ability to, or otherwise unable to, protect his/her own rights and vital interests, or to report abuse or neglect without assistance because of physical or mental impairment.

SIGNIS personnel

For the purpose of this protocol, the definition of a SIGNIS World personnel is any individual, whether an employee, volunteer or individual who receives other compensation (such as a stipend, honorarium or in-kind compensation) to assist in the work of SIGNIS World. This work is defined broadly as programs or activities funded, directed or immediately managed by the international office of SIGNIS, the World board of directors, SIGNIS World employees or other personnel.

VICTIMS ASSISTANCE COORDINATOR (VAC)

Stefan Eß, Executive Director of Sankt Michaelsbund
Email address: s.ess@michaelsbund.de

SAFE ENVIRONMENT OFFICER

Maria Chiara De Lorenzo, SIGNIS Assistant Secretary General
Email address: assistantsecretarygeneral@signis.net

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SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROTOCOL

1. PREVENTION OF ABUSE

Proactive efforts to prevent abuse are of paramount priority for SIGNIS World. Because our organization includes personnel from every region of SIGNIS, including employees who work “remotely,” our ability to legislate is limited. These protocols provide minimal standards. SIGNIS World personnel are encouraged to be proactive in their protection of minors and vulnerable persons and find local collaborators to enhance our efforts in this area.

1.1. Safe Environment Requirements for SIGNIS Personnel

All adult employees, volunteers and elected officials who provide services or function in the international programs and activities of SIGNIS World are required to be in compliance with their local ecclesiastical authority’s requirements for safe environment training AND provide to the SIGNIS World Safe Environment Officer verification of the following:

- 1.1.1. Completion of training on how to prevent, detect and intervene in cases of sexual abuse. Minimally, this training should be completed every three years. This training can be provided by the local ecclesiastical authority, civic authority or other competent authority, such as an NGO which provides such training for its personnel. The Secretary General or designated representative can assist the SIGNIS personnel in locating an accepted training program in their homeland.
- 1.1.2. Consent to the SIGNIS World Code of Pastoral Conduct by providing an electronic signature.
- 1.1.3. A “Letter of Good Standing” from their bishop or religious superior.

Documentation verifying these three requirements must be received by the Safe Environment Officer prior to the SIGNIS Personnel engaging in work for SIGNIS. This documentation will be kept on file at the SIGNIS World administrative office.

1.2. Safe Environment Requirements for Minors

Recognizing its limitations in supervising minors, SIGNIS World expressively forbids anyone under the age of 18 to be engaged in SIGNIS World personnel positions as defined in this policy.

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2. REPORTING ABUSE

- 2.1. SIGNIS World personnel who observe or are made aware of possible sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person should without delay:
 - 2.1.1. Contact the SIGNIS Victims Assistance Coordinator;
 - 2.1.2. Contact the local ecclesiastical authority, if the alleged abuse was committed by a cleric, religious or church personnel;
 - 2.1.3. Contact local civil authorities, in accord with local laws.
- 2.2. The SIGNIS Victims Assistance Coordinator (VAC) will conduct an initial assessment and determine if a formal investigation is appropriate. This work will be done in confidence and with the highest priorities being the safety and well-being of the alleged victim and the person making the report.
- 2.3. The SIGNIS VAC will provide a written report to the SIGNIS Secretary General and President within 72 hours of receiving the initial report. When reporting the VAC will use simple, clear, direct, precise, non-emotive, objective language and avoid jargon.
- 2.4. This report will include:
 - 2.4.1. Name and contact information of the person who contacted the VAC;
 - 2.4.2. All details provided by the person;
 - 2.4.3. The date and location when and where the information was received by the VAC; and
 - 2.4.4. The VAC's professional opinion of the situation and recommendation whether a formal investigation should be made.
- 2.5. The SIGNIS Secretary General and President will respond to the SIGNIS VAC report within 24 hours and determine a plan of action appropriate to the contents of the report. This plan of action could include placing the accused SIGNIS personnel on administrative leave while an independent investigation is conducted, collaborating with local ecclesiastical or civil authorities, or informing the public of potential harm caused by agents of SIGNIS World.

3. CODE OF CONDUCT

All SIGNIS personnel will agree to the following Code of Conduct and provide a signed copy of the Code of Conduct to the Safe Environment Coordinator before beginning work for SIGNIS World.

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SIGNIS Code of Conduct

Our children are the most important gifts God has entrusted to us. As a member of SIGNIS or a collaborator with SIGNIS World, I promise to strictly follow the rules and guidelines in this Volunteer's Code of Conduct as a condition of my providing services on behalf of SIGNIS World.

I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Avoid situations where I am alone with minors or vulnerable persons at SIGNIS activities.
- Use positive reinforcement rather than criticism, competition, or comparison when working with minors or vulnerable persons.
- Use social media in a positive and affirming manner and protect the identify of all minors or vulnerable persons when using social media for a SIGNIS activity.
- Refuse to accept expensive gifts from minors or vulnerable persons or their parents/guardians without prior written approval from the administrator of the SIGNIS program or activity.
- Refrain from giving expensive gifts to minors or vulnerable persons without prior written approval from their parents/guardians and the administrator of the SIGNIS program or activity.
- Report suspected abuse to the administrator of the SIGNIS program or activity, the proper local civil authorities and the local ecclesiastical authority. I understand that, for a person who is required under the law to report, failure to report suspected abuse to civil authorities could result in fines or arrest.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of minors or vulnerable persons.

I will not:

- Use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol at any time while acting as a SIGNIS World personnel.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of illegal drugs at any time.
- Pose any health risk to minors or vulnerable persons (i.e., no fevers or other contagious situations).
- Strike, spank, shake, or slap minors or vulnerable persons.
- Humiliate, ridicule, threaten, or degrade minors or vulnerable persons.
- Touch a minor or vulnerable person in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Use any discipline that frightens or humiliates minors or vulnerable persons.
- Use profanity in the presence of minors or vulnerable persons.

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- Acquire, possess or distribute pornographic images of minors or vulnerable persons.
- Post images or other media which could identify a minor or vulnerable person, unless directed to do so by the SIGNIS World administration and only with written permission of parents/guardians.

I understand that any action inconsistent with this Code of Conduct or failure to take action mandated by this Code of Conduct may result in my removal as a SIGNIS World personnel working with children and/or youth.

SIGNED:

DATE:

DATE RECEIVED BY SIGNIS SAFE ENVIRONMENT COORDINATOR:

Brussels, 27/11/2023

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