

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Responsibility - Commitment – Tasks



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Presentation

The International Forum of Catholic Action brings together Catholic Action Associations and Federations of Lay Apostolate Associations organised at national level which concurrently abide by the four characteristic notes laid down by the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council in the Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem in numbers 20, 2-3, and which are also found in the Post-Synodal Exhortation Christifideles Laici in number 31.3.

Aim:

- to be a space where Catholic Action groups from different countries, regions and continents can share their problems and support one another;
- to analyse the global dimension of the big problems which contemporary society poses to the Church and to Catholic Action;
- to encourage and promote the “new evangelisation” while respecting the structural and pastoral realities of each Catholic Action Association.

Objectives:

- a) to help groups get to know one another;
- b) to promote initiatives aimed at supporting and developing the specific services which Catholic Action Associations and Federations of Catholic Action Movements are called to give, in keeping with their identity and respecting the diverse cultural, social and ecclesial contexts in which they operate;
- c) to promote initiatives aimed at a deeper study of the problems which effect the life and mission of the Church at universal, continental and regional level;
- d) to establish relations of dialogue and collaboration with all lay apostolate organisations at international level especially with those recognised by the ICO;
- e) to represent Catholic Action Associations and Federations of Catholic Action Movements members of the Forum with the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life and the other bodies of the Holy See;
- f) to represent Catholic Associations and Federations of Catholic Action Movements members of the Forum with civil International Organisations always respecting the Forum’s ecclesial nature and its aims.

Faced with the problem of abuse, the Forum expresses **ZERO TOLERANCE** towards any kind of violence and abuse and commits itself to promote and create a safe environment for all

its members and for all those who benefit from its mission and commits itself to prevent and eradicate all type of abuse

Catholic Action groups, in the various countries, work so that the laity, whatever their age, children, young people and adults, find a space where they can be in communion with their parishes and their dioceses and where they can grow in faith and where they can carry out the mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God wherever they live and work. They pay special attention to the care of children and young people as well as of the most vulnerable. They collaborate in their formation and in their full huma development.

Within this framework, IFCA will do its best to ensure that each member country adopts a specific policy to provide a safe environment and to prevent and fight against all forms of abuse on children, adolescents and the vulnerable.

Thus, IFCA commits itself to help:

- Catholic Action leaders to be specifically trained to be aware of the problems and the related damage caused by sexual abuse and maltreatment;
- strengthen the human formation of its members, its priest assistants and of all those who participate in its activities;
- ensure that its members are aware of the attitudes and behaviour which threaten their privacy and help them strengthen their self-esteem and critical judgement and teach them how to defend their integrity.

As CA is a fraternal community, it is evident that it:

- has always based its services and probably its very existence on the culture of positive relations among its members of all ages;
- has collaborated in the educational development of the very young and accompanied them as they grow up;
- has contributed towards the integral human development of all those who benefitted from the evangelising and missionary activities carried out by its members.

This document, drawn up by IFCA, aims at giving general guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons. These will be updated in accordance with new legislative and social developments and on evaluations which are carried out from time to time.

The Word of God as a starting point

The Word of God enlightens us:

- We believe in equality and in the dignity of the human person: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.' (Gen 1:27)
- We believe that people are at the centre of our mission: 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath' (Mk 2:27). (Mk 2:27)
- We believe in living true love and promoting people's happiness: 'By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'. (Jn 13, 35)
- We believe in defending and protecting the poorest and the most vulnerable: 'Truly I tell you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). (Mt 25:40). 'Whoever scandalises one of the least of these who believe in me, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the depths of the sea'. (Mt 18, 6)
- We believe in peace and in a non-violent response: 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", but I say to you, do not stand up to the one who wrongs you'. (Mt 5:38)
- We believe in truth and in people's freedom: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (Jn 8, 31-32).

Christ's pedagogy shows us the way:

- He taught them with authority (Mk 1, 21-22), imparting knowledge and service with dedication.
- He based his teaching on life experiences, started from everyday realities always respecting His audience (Mt 5,1-2),
- He taught by example. With His gestures and actions He showed us a new way of acting and living. Jesus taught through his own witness (Mt 23, 1-7),
- The human person and his/her particular situation were always the main concern of His actions (Mk 2, 27).
- In His works of mercy, he respected the freedom of the individual (Lk 7, 48-50).
- His main objective was to show love and to foster happiness in people (Jn 13, 34-35; Mt 9, 35-36).
- He lived the beatitudes (Mt 5, 3-12).
- He served everyone but especially those most in need (Mt 25, 31-46).

From the Word of God, **we reaffirm the value of the human life** which God gives to each one of us as a gift and that Jesus came to redeem us, so that we may have life in abundance (Jn 10:10). Therefore, in situations where human dignity is violated, we should, as the Holy Father tells us, 'keep watchful eyes on our brothers and sisters, especially on those who suffer' (12 August 2020).

Legislative framework

The magisterium of the Holy Father and the documents issued by the Holy See are the legislative points of reference for this document.

In addition to the 1983 CANON LAW CODE, which was emended (8 December 2021) in Book VI on the penal sanctions in the Church, there are other documents which establish the procedures which have to be followed in cases where the offenders are clerics, members of religious congregations or lay people who have contact with minors in religious institutions. The most important of these documents are

- Motu proprio *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, 2001 (John Paul II), modified with the new norms of 2010 (Benedict XVI).
- Norms on more serious crimes reserved for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Benedict XVI, 2010), which modifies the preceding document by raising the age of the victim to 18 years and considers minors as persons with an undeveloped use of reason.
- Circular letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the Bishops' Conferences (3 May 2011): Guidelines on cases of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy.
- The setting up of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (24 March 2014).
- Directives of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (2015).
- Motu proprio 'Like a loving mother' (Francis, 4 June 2016).
- Letter to the People of God (Francis, 20 August 2018).
- Motu proprio *Vos estis lux mundi*, 9 May 2019.
- VADEMECUM: On certain procedural matters regarding cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 5 June 2022):
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/ddf/rc_ddf_doc_20220605_vademecum-casi-abuso-2.0_sp.html
- CCC Book VI: Penal Sanctions in the Church canons 1311-1399.

Thus, if these offences are committed by clerics or by lay people carrying out an ecclesial mission, these will be dealt with both by the **Penal Code of each country** and by the **norms of the Canon Law**.

Therefore, the **rulings established by the Episcopal Conferences** and the regulations emanating from the **laws of each country** both apply.

Following the United Nations recommendations and, taking into account, the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** of which the Holy See is a signatory we affirm that:

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.



And all this... WHAT FOR?

The International Forum of Catholic Action **commits** itself to:

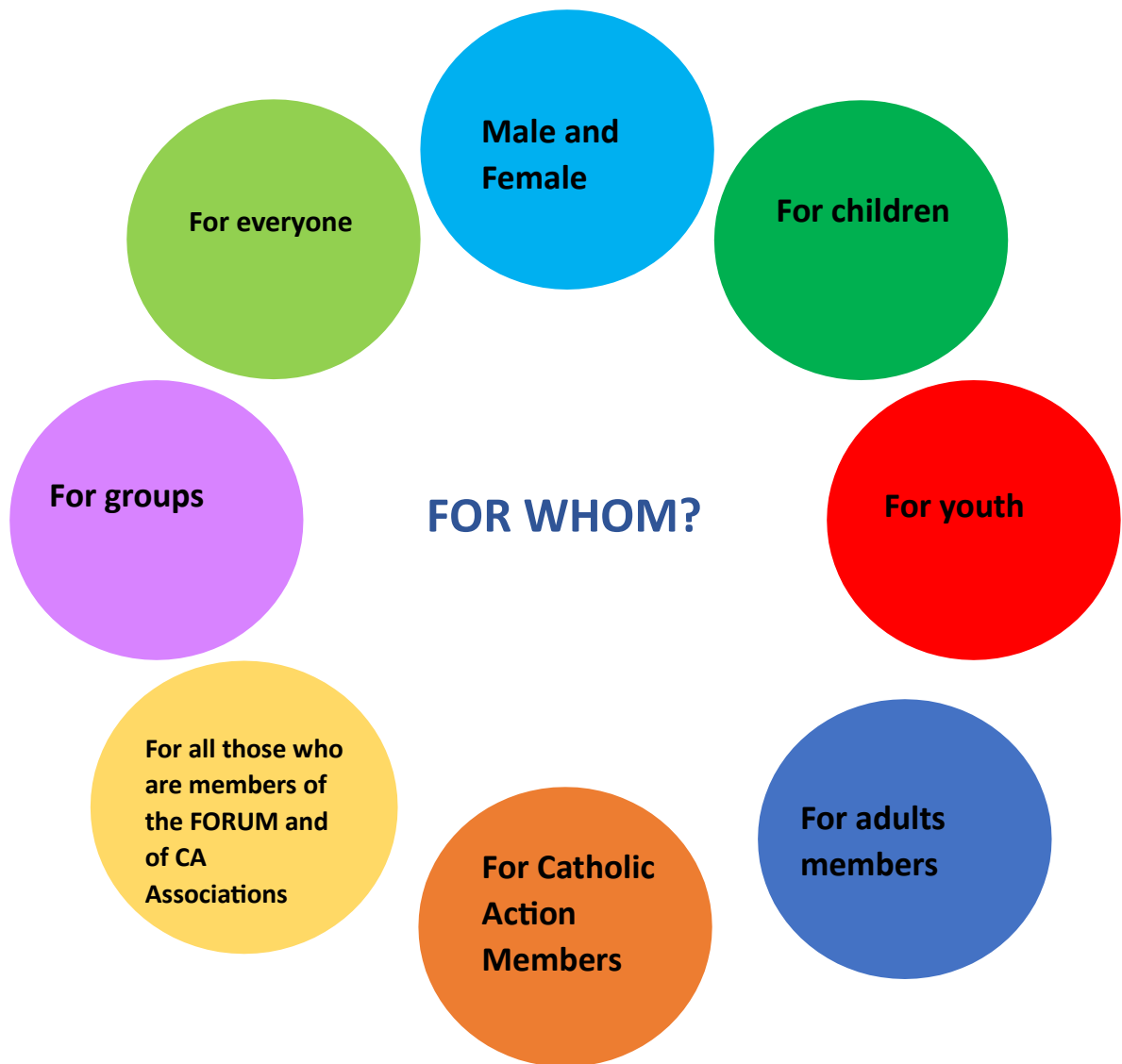
1. **Zero tolerance** as regards the issue of abuse.
2. **Train** the various associations in the different countries so that, within the framework of the norms of their Episcopal Conferences and their own legislation, they are prepared:
 - a) to put **people** and their dignity, as **sons and daughters of God, at the centre** of all their actions.
 - b) to promote the formation of all their members so that they may all adopt a lifestyle coherent with the Gospel.
 - c) to enable members to be aware of any action which constitutes an offence to the human person, especially to the most vulnerable brothers and sisters.
 - d) to Identify circumstances in the life of the association which require special attention and prudence.
 - e) to draw up a formation, prevention and intervention programme in eventual cases of abuse.
3. The FORUM guarantees **a safe environment** to all participants in all its meetings and activities.

That is why our objective is...

In line with the regulations for the protection of children, adolescents and vulnerable people, we share the need to motivate action in the various countries aimed at:

- **Promoting awareness and preventive measures** to reject and eliminate violence against children, adolescents and vulnerable people and to facilitate its early detection.
- **Informing and training** vulnerable children and adolescents to detect violence and to react to it, as well as to stand up for their rights to be heard and to give their points of view in contexts of violence against them.
- **Guaranteeing reparation and restoration** of victims' rights.
- **Guaranteeing special attention** to minors, young people and vulnerable adults.
- **Overcoming stereotypes** of any kind.
- **Guaranteeing coordinated action** and constant collaboration between the different civil and ecclesiastical bodies involved in these cases.

In our communities, we want to care for and protect members of our associations, especially children, adolescents, youth and adults, as well as all those involved in our evangelising and humanitarian mission, by taking all the necessary prompt action in situations which could violate their rights and undermine their human dignity.



The creation of a **safe environment** should guarantee educational relationships which are:

- a positive, protective and caring experience
- the best possible pleasant experience for all children, youths and adults
- safe from any potential danger or abuse, especially those resulting from neglect and carelessness and/or poor and/or from inadequate training.

A safe environment

- gives a feeling of welcoming protection;
- provides security and fosters self-confidence, rendering the person better able to face and cope with situations which could be embarrassing;
- helps individuals to share emotions and problems;
- makes it easy to listen to each other's fears;
- helps in understanding the needs of others;
- encourages the person, without any pressure, to express his/her concerns;
- offers an opportunity to speak openly about what could be done when faced with a problem.



On abuse

The main objective in providing a safe environment is **the PERSON**. every individual, especially the vulnerable.

All our evangelising and formative attention is focused on them by creating spaces where they can develop and grow and by fostering healthy bonds in safe environments in our associations and in their family circles and in their social life.

When a person is exposed to a situation of abuse, he or she is the **victim** of a crime and therefore there is a **culprit** who should be brought before the law.

Alleged victims

- Minors who have not reached the legal age of 18
- A **vulnerable person** or a person going through a vulnerable situation such as a person with physical, mental, psychic, psychological or spiritual problems

Alleged aggressors or perpetrators

- Mainly **adults**, that is grown-ups, irrespective of their ecclesial, or familiar role
- Adolescents or young people who are responsible for organising activities for younger children or for vulnerable people.

Victims, as well as presumed victims, should be listened to with attention. One should understand their difficulties and should accompany them until they find a solution to their situation and get their deserved compensation.

The alleged **perpetrators** should be reported to the competent authorities, following the norms of the Bishops' Conferences and the legislation of each respective Country, so that they may have a fair trial which determines their involvement. They should be offered spiritual accompaniment aimed at helping them reach a sincere conversion in a true spirit of justice and mercy.

Abuse comprises a series of different problematic issues which need to be taken into consideration:

| ABUSES | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ill-treatment | | | Sexual abuse | |
| Sexual abuse on infants | Online Soliciting (grooming) | Bullying | Other forms of ill-treatment | Abuse of power and of conscience |

Strategic framework

IFCA will guide and accompany associations in defining strategies aimed at:

- **Raising awareness and training:** On the one hand, it is necessary to raise awareness and train people so that they can establish relationships of good treatment and mutual care. But it is not only a matter of learning to care for others but also of learning to care for oneself. To do this, educators must be guided through a process which helps them to understand and to get a basic knowledge of the dynamics of relationships. This helps them to become aware of their own ways of relating to children and to be able to read in the children's stories, the main relation dynamics which children have learnt in the family and which they are putting into practice with others
Training, especially in **attentive listening**, is of the utmost importance as it helps in establishing good relations with the little ones, in being able to "go down to the children's level" and in listening actively and attentively, even to what children do not say.
- **Prevention:** On the other hand, it is also necessary to prevent situations of abuse. In this sense, one needs to know how to identify risky behaviour and what constitutes abuse so as to be able to draw up a code of behaviour and a way of fraternal coexistence which is acceptable to all.
- **Intervention:** One also needs to know how to proceed in case of a possible situations of abuse by establishing a protocol which permits an adequate and effective intervention, seeking above all to safeguard and protect the alleged victim. At the same time, the alleged aggressor should be helped to go through a process of reflection so that he/she can change his/her life.

It is suggested that the Forum organises at least one Annual Safe Environment Meeting in which the coordinators of each member country can participate and exchange experiences which favour the implementation of the safe environment policy in each country.

Formation and prevention strategy

The best way to care for every individual person who participates in our groups and those whom we meet in our evangelising mission, is to foresee any situation which could be dangerous. That is why it is important to think of a multi-pronged strategy and to draw up a code of good practice to be followed by all members, volunteers and participants in our activities. This applies particularly to leaders, animators and those who accompany others.

Formation Strategy

The Forum will promote specific safe environment training as part of its meetings and activities. It will also encourage each association to provide training for all its members.

This formation strategy should aim at:

- **promoting the integral formation of each person:** so that in the personal encounter with Jesus, he adopts a Christian lifestyle that allows him to reach his fullness and holiness, in short, to reach the state of the new life in Christ, identifying deeply with Him (EN19).
- **giving attention to all the dimensions of the human person:** human, communitarian, intellectual, spiritual, pastoral and missionary.
- **developing** the skill of taking care of oneself, of detecting hazardous situations and the ability to communicate and to speak out in critical situations.
- **promoting knowledge and competence in the field of abuse:** the ability to interpret the signs of calls for help from potential victims, protective communication, shared good practices and codes of conduct.
- **providing safe environments:** spaces or 'places where ones faith in Jesus crucified and risen can be regenerated, where one can share ones deepest questions and daily concerns, where one can discern in depth with evangelical criteria about his own existence and experiences, with the aim of directing ones individual and social choices towards goodness and beauty' (EG 77).
- **re-launching an authentic intergenerational educational alliance:** a deal of co-responsibility among all the adult generations which, while respecting their different roles and specific competencies, calls them to accompany and responsibly care for the new generations in their lives' journey.

It is suggested that the Forum organises at least **one annual online training meeting, on the subject of Safe Environment**, for its members and for members of the associations in the different countries.

Organisational strategy

In all our activities, both in those organised by the Forum, as well as in those organised by Associations in member countries, especially where minors are involved, one should keep in mind certain organisational guidelines:

§ **Signed authorisation:** All activities organised for minors should be duly authorised by the parents or legal guardians.

§ **Taking of photos within the institution:**

- Photos or videos should preferably be of groups and should be for the exclusive use of the association. They should never be pictures of private, intimate or compromising situations or of situations of a sexual nature or of humiliating or violent situations.
- Signed authorisation is required to work on, produce and disseminate material for the social media or for the associations' publications.
- The photos are to be taken using the association's equipment, never using private devices.

Safe Environment Delegate: A Safe Environment Delegate, whom the participants should know and to whom they can refer their concerns and their initiatives or complaints, should be present in all activities.

Besides, all activities should comply with a **CODE OF CONDUCT:**

§ **Staying alone with a minor or with a vulnerable person:**

- Avoid being left alone for a prolonged length of time.
- If you need to talk in private, always do so outside or in a place which is visible and accessible to others, with good lighting, with open doors or with windows through which one can see.
- If you need to examine a sick or injured child, always do so in the presence of another adult.
- If physical contact is necessary, inform parents or guardians beforehand and in case of emergency, inform them afterwards.

§ **Overnight trips:**

- Signed authorisation from parents or legal guardians is always required
- An adequate number of qualified accompanying persons should always be ensured
- Accommodation should always be differentiated by gender
- Unless duly justified, a minor should never share a room with an adult. If this is the case, the adult should always be accompanied by another adult.

§ **Toilets and showers:**

- Changing rooms, showers or toilets should never be visited when in use by minors or vulnerable people;
- If this is necessary, the visit should be made by two adults of the same sex as the minors or vulnerable persons and an adequate safe distance should always be kept.

Recruitment strategy and choice of volunteers

Prevention starts with the recruitment of staff in the organisations, as well as with the selection of volunteers. These will eventually work as managers, animators, leaders and/or companions, especially if they are going to work with minors or vulnerable people.

The local regulations in each country should be followed, such as the need for a conduct record related to sexual offences.

In addition, these **guidelines** should be followed:

- Request for references from applicants.
- Involvement of at least two persons in the selection process.
- Verification of credentials submitted.
- Adequate experience in the performance of this work.
- Knowledge and acceptance of the Church's doctrine, of a safe environment programme and of the protection policies in the respective agency.
- Commitment to participate in basic and refresher training courses as requested by the organisation.

Rules of coexistence and respect

It is important that the groups establish rules for happy coexistence, good behaviour and mutual care.

These rules should always seek to **promote awareness of the respect towards everybody's rights**: in particular, the rights of children and/or adolescents, young people, adults and vulnerable people. This ensures that roles and responsibilities and the need to report immediately any inappropriate behaviour are clear to all.

Besides, in specific situations, compliance with the **CODE OF CONDUCT** is expected.

§ Physical manifestations of affection:

- these should be done with great prudence and never exaggerated in force or duration.
- they should be made by touching safe areas of the body (such as the back, arms, head, shoulders...) and never erogenous or intimate areas (thighs, buttocks, genitals, breasts...).
- -respect towards the integrity of the receiving person should always be ensured and the receiving person should be left free to reject them, thus ensuring that these displays of affection are being accepted.

§ Games, jokes or punishments:

- These should never involve any performance or any kind of behaviour which might have sexual connotations (undressing, kissing...).
- Punishments or physical contact should never be justified in such circumstances
- Any kind of behaviour towards others, which is degrading, demeaning or sexist should never be allowed.

§ Sentimental relationships:

- With children, it is important to establish clear limits as regards sentimental relationships.
- It is normal that minors idealise their relationship with those who accompany them and provoke feelings or insinuations, to which the adult should never respond.
- Sentimental relationships with minors should never be accepted.

Action protocol

Each association should draw up **its own action protocol**, following the ecclesiastical norms and its country's legislation. These should include:

- **rules for the care and treatment** of minors and vulnerable people.
- an easy way of access for individuals to the associations' governing bodies which ensures confidentiality to all parties and which gives them the possibility to submit complaints without fear of pressure but ensuring the alleged right to good reputation of the person against whom the complaint is being raised.
- a clear way how individuals can **submit complaints to church and civil authorities** at the same time, ensuring confidentiality to all parties and in accordance with the regulations of the legislation in force in every country and those of the Bishops' Conferences.
- **preventive procedures** for the removal from office of any alleged perpetrator until such time as a judicial decision is made on the procedural status of the alleged perpetrator.

Complaints may be raised when it comes to:

- inappropriate behaviour or conduct;
- harassment, including sexual abuse and exploitation;
- emotional abuse, such as coercion, humiliation, intimidation, bullying, harassment, etc.
- conscientious and/or spiritual abuse.
- any kind of abuse which violates human dignity.

Guidelines for action for associations

Our associative commitment keeps the human person at the centre of our commitment and gives priority to the rights and needs of the victim, while at the same time guaranteeing procedural fairness. Thus, all Catholic Action Associations **should ensure that** in case of abuse:

- they treat the victim with dignity and respect;
- respect the victim's sensitivity, avoiding situations of re-victimisation during the process;
- whenever possible, involve the victim in decision-making;
- keep the victim fully informed;
- respect privacy and confidentiality;
- avoid discriminating on the basis of gender, age, race/ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation or any other traits;
- consider the need to provide counselling and health services to help the victim.

When faced with an alleged aggression committed against a child, an adolescent, a young person and/or an adult, it is important:

- to act immediately by reporting the situation to the leader of the association;
- to remain calm;
- to listen carefully and respectfully;
- never to blame or judge the person involved;
- appreciate the victim's courage to speak out and that he is not to blame for what happened;
- direct the investigations about the case in a way which makes it possible to determine what happened, when, where and who was involved, without looking for too many details.

Those involved in dealing with complaints are bound to treat all legal and all other information related to the case with utmost confidentiality. Breaching of confidentiality calls for a warning and immediate suspension.

The complaints are to be registered in an internal digital file with restricted access.

Members of the coordinating team are to have access to this file so that they can carry out any adequate follow-up, monitor the steps taken and keep a record of the results while maintaining confidentiality.

- The report should indicate whether the incident happened in an associative or ecclesial environment, such as in an association which operates at diocesan level or is directly dependent on the diocesan bishop, if the association has and follows the prevention plans and protocols established by the diocese, in coordination with the Office or teams responsible for the care of victims of abuse and for the protection of minors.
- The association should have mechanisms for the protection of the victim, the separation of the presumed aggressor from the victim while the process is being investigated and the safeguarding of other persons in the association who might be exposed to aggression. These regulations should be within the framework of the established norms and responsibility of the Association's Statutes, Regulations or Constitutive Charters.
- National and diocesan bodies are to be responsible for awareness-raising and training on prevention at diocesan level as well as to ensure intervention measures in all activities carried out.
- In case of suspected crime, whether in the ecclesial and/or associative sphere or in the intra-family or social sphere, this should be reported to the appropriate local governmental bodies.

Associations should have an address **where complaints can be submitted** and a **team which can deal with the complaints and take action** always following the principles of prudence and data protection.

In addition, the Forum should set up a **crisis management team** of suitably trained professionals and individuals to support the general coordinator and his team.

It is proposed that within two years, each Catholic Action Association in the member countries:

- appoints a **Safe Environment Coordinator** to liaise with the Forum for the necessary communications and follow-up.
- **draw up its own Action Protocol**, in keeping with its country's regulations and the given instructions.
- **set up an address** to receive complaints and a **team** which can deal with the complaints and follow them up.
- **draw up** a structured training and awareness-raising plan for the members of the particular association and promote **compliance with the Code of Conduct** in all activities.



**Let us ask the Lord to grant us all,
eyes which know how to see beyond appearances;
ears which know how to listen to cries,
whispers as well as silence;
hands which know how to support, embrace and heal.**

**Above all, let us ask for a big and merciful heart
which desires the best
and salvation for all.**

Amen.

Francis, 2014 to CA