

The impact of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals on children and the family, and their endorsement by the Holy See

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved by member states on 25 September 2015, include targets that call for “universal access to sexual and reproductive health” by 2030. This term is understood by UN bodies, many international governments and international agencies to refer, *inter alia*, to access to abortion and contraception. The targets will also further the imposition of harmful “comprehensive sexuality education programmes”. In this briefing we will explain how the approval of the SDGs by Pope Francis in September 2016, and the previous support offered for them by other organs of the Holy See, have intensified the threat posed by the SDGs to the most vulnerable members of the human family.

1. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals call for “universal access to sexual and reproductive health”

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 goals and 169 targets that are intended to be achieved by 2030.

Goal 3 of the SDGs is to: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”

Target 7 of this goal calls on nation states to:

“ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.”

Goal 5 of the SDGs is to: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Target 6 of this goal states that nations must:

“Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.”¹

¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015. The text of the Sustainable Development Goals can be downloaded at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E, [Accessed 14 December 2016].

2. The term “universal access to sexual and reproductive health” includes universal access to abortion and contraception

The above term, “sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights”, and other similar formulations, are commonly used by United Nation bodies, and by many national governments and international agencies to refer, *inter alia*, to access to abortion and contraception, including contraception that can have an abortifacient mode of action. The population control and “reproductive rights” movements have always intended that these terms should include abortion, as well as contraception, and they use them consistently in this sense; however it is important to note that these movements have never succeeded in establishing a “right to abortion” in international law.²

The definition of “sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights” accepted by UN member states (with reservations from a number of nations) is that found in the Programme of Action of the United Nations’ International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994.³ Contraception is considered an integral part of “reproductive health”, as can be seen in paragraphs 7.8, 7.10, 7.13, 7.23, 7.25, 12.15 and 13.14 of this document. Paragraph 13.14 (b) states that “abortion (as specified in paragraph 8.25)” is a “basic component of reproductive health care services”. Paragraph 8.25 accepts abortion in jurisdictions where it is “not against the law”, in which circumstances it “should be safe”, and acknowledges that in some cases there may be a “need for abortion”. This paragraph is restated in in chapter IV, section C, paragraph 106.k of the 1995 United Nations’ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.⁴ The Beijing Platform for Action also promotes contraception, as can be seen, for example, in 106.u of the above quoted section.⁵

² A comprehensive overview of the use of this term can be found in Susan Yoshihara Ph.D., “Lost in Translation: The Failure of the International Reproductive Right Norm”, *Ave Maria Law Review*, (Spring 2013).

³ United Nations, *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action*, (Cairo, 1994).

⁴ United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, (Beijing, 1995).

⁵ However, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action cannot be considered to establish a “right to abortion” in international law. The Programme of Action states that: “The implementation of the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action is the sovereign right of each country, consistent with national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of its people, and in conformity with universally recognized international human rights” (Chapter II, introductory paragraph). Paragraph 7.4 of the Programme of Action states that the “implementation of the present Programme of Action is to be guided by the above comprehensive definition of reproductive health, which includes sexual health.” This definition is to be found in paragraph 7.2 and does not explicitly include abortion. Furthermore, there was no consensus reached on the definition of sexual and reproductive health. The Holy See only “partially” joined the consensus at both Cairo and Beijing, refusing consensus for the entirety of Chapter IV, Section C, at Beijing. At Cairo and Beijing numerous states entered reservations regarding a number of terms, such as “reproductive health”, “sexual health”, “regulation of fertility” and “unwanted pregnancy”, stating that they could not accept interpretations of these terms that included abortion. The failure to secure support among member states for a “right to abortion” does not alter the reality that the terms “sexual and reproductive health and rights” have been intended to be used, and have always been used, to further access to abortion and abortifacient forms of contraception.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), an agency of the United Nations, considers abortion to be an integral part of “sexual and reproductive health”. The WHO states that as part of its work it

“develops norms, tools and guidelines on reproductive health in general and abortion services in particular, and supports countries in reforming their health systems. Its role includes:

- distributing existing evidence on abortion;
- assisting Member States in evaluating health systems’ response to the needs of women with unwanted pregnancies;
- promoting methodology in quality control of abortion services; and
- training of trainers in, for example, counselling and abortion care.”⁶

The WHO, as part of its work to promote “reproductive health”, actively works to “improve access to abortion and the quality of their abortion services” in “countries such as Ireland”, which currently have restrictive abortion laws.⁷

Initiatives led by UN agencies and other international organisations have worked radically to increase use of contraception, and access to abortion worldwide, under the guise of “universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services”.

An example of one such an initiative is the “Maputo Plan of Action for the Operationalisation of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights” aimed at “Universal Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Africa”.⁸ It was produced in 2006 following a special session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Health in Maputo, Mozambique.

The document specifically identified “Abortion Care” as an integral part of sexual and reproductive health. Its plan of action for “Implementing the Continental Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy Framework” included the following resolutions:

- “5.2.1a Train service providers in the provision of comprehensive safe abortion care services where national law allows
- 5.2.2 Refurbish and equip facilities for provision of comprehensive abortion care services
- 5.3.1a Provide safe abortion services to the fullest extent of the law
- 5.3.2 Educate communities on available safe abortion services as allowed by national laws”

⁶ “Abortion”, *World Health Organization: Regional Office for Europe*, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/activities/abortion>, [Accessed 17 November 2016].

⁷ “Abortion”, *World Health Organization: Regional Office for Europe*, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/activities/abortion>, [Accessed 17 November 2016].

⁸ *Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (Maputo Plan of Action)*. The full text is available for download at: http://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/esaro/files/pub-pdf/maputo_eng.pdf.

The “Maputo Plan of Action” explicitly included access to “family planning” and “emergency contraception” as targets for “universal access to sexual and reproductive health”. The document also specifically targets children, stating that “Addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents and youth” is a key component of “sexual and reproductive health”.

3. Programmes for the implementation of the SDGs that promote abortion and contraception are already being developed

The approval of the SDGs in September 2015 is already leading to the further proliferation of initiatives similar to the “Maputo Plan of Action”. The World Health Organisation has developed the Innov8 approach to assist in the implementation of Goal 3 of the SDGs. The foreword to the handbook states:

“The Innov8 approach supports the objectives and spirit of the SDGs by helping health professionals to identify health inequities in different country contexts, and to correct them by recalibrating health programmes and interventions.”⁹

Access to “sexual and reproductive health”, including abortion and contraception, is placed at the centre of this approach. Table 2.2 sets out three examples of how goal 3 of the SDGs might be implemented.¹⁰ The third example presents a strategy for the area of:

“Healthy sexuality and teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)”

Suggested “interventions” and “inputs” are:

“Health education, counselling and free contraceptives”

and

“Trained teachers and health personnel, infrastructure, contraceptives, etc.”

In order to achieve:

“Lower levels of unmet need for contraception, higher levels of knowledge”¹¹

⁹ World Health Organisation, *Innov8*, (Geneva, 2016), p3.

¹⁰ *Innov8*, p63.

¹¹ The United Nations considers women to have an “unmet need for contraception” if they are “sexually active”, not planning to have a child within the next two years, and not using a modern contraceptive method. This is a seriously flawed approach because it assumes that every such woman would use modern contraceptive methods if available. This fails to take into account many women who would not use contraceptive methods if they were available, whether as a result of moral principles, health concerns or some other reason. “Unmet need” is not a measure of desire for or access to contraception.

In table 2.3 we read that in the context of “Adolescent sexual health” there can be “differences in availability, accessibility, acceptability of adolescent friendly health services and contraception by sex, age and neighbourhood” that will require a number of different “interventions”. The example given here is “additional or differential interventions for low income communities and school dropouts, including [those] that consider and aim to transform harmful gender norms, roles and relations.”¹²

The handbook also considers “condoms” as among the “essential resources” for women.¹³ Furthermore, in common with goal 5 of the SDGs, figure 5.2 considers “reproductive rights” to be an integral part of “gender equality”.¹⁴

The Innov8 approach has already been implemented in Nepal as part of the “national adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme”. The aim of this programme, which is being further developed following the approval of the SDGs, is to “further availability, accessibility and coverage of services for all adolescents”.¹⁵

Such “services”, as the WHO’s definition of “sexual and reproductive health” makes clear, can comprise of abortion and contraception, amongst other things.

The Innov8 handbook explains that the programme has worked “to sensitize the community about the importance of ASRH [Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health]” and proposed the “formation, coordination and mobilization of child clubs, junior and youth Red Cross circles” as among “mechanisms for strengthening participation” in the “ASRH programme”.¹⁶ This means that youth clubs were set up with the intention of using them to promote abortion and contraception to children and adolescents. Other strategies adopted include making adolescents “full members of local health forum committees at local level” and ensuring “necessary changes in guidelines and protocols to ensure the participation of all concerned stakeholders”.¹⁷ What underlies such proposals is the desire to gain direct access to children and adolescents without having to pass through protective structures provided by parents, extended family, schools and religious authorities. This desire to bypass protective social structures is also reflected in the “tentative redesign proposals” set out in Table 7.2, which aims at the further expansion of Nepal’s adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme in the light of the SDGs.¹⁸ These draft proposals include the following suggestion:

“If community outreach (beyond using schools) is done by elder providers and adolescents fear lack of confidentiality, adapt [provision of ASRH] for age-sensitivity and privacy, and enhance provider’s capacity”

¹² *Innov8*, p64.

¹³ *Innov8*, p19.

¹⁴ *Innov8*, p131.

¹⁵ *Innov8*, p215.

¹⁶ *Innov8*, p163.

¹⁷ *Innov8*, p163.

¹⁸ *Innov8*, p187.

The draft proposals also propose providing:

“capacity building materials/supports that tackle social and cultural norms that make providers and teachers shy away from ASRH.”

In other words, they intend to provide materials that will undermine those traditional moral and religious beliefs that are currently preventing “providers and teachers” from promoting contraception and abortion.

This “adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme” is a radical assault on the wellbeing of children and adolescents in Nepal, which will be just one of many nations that will experience the devastating impact of the implementation of goals 3 and 5 of the SDGs.

4. The SDGs call for “education” in the area of “sexual and reproductive health”

Powerful governments and international organisations are aggressively promoting “comprehensive sexuality education” programmes at the United Nations, and through other international institutions. The World Health Organisation’s “Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe” provides a typical example of the aims of such programmes.¹⁹ These guidelines suggest the following topics should be taught to children who fall into the specified age brackets:

0 – 4

“enjoyment and pleasure when touching one’s own body”

“early childhood masturbation”

“right to explore gender identities”

4 – 6

“same-sex relationships”

“respect for different norms regarding sexuality”

9 – 12

“differences between gender identity and biological sex”

“sexual rights” as “defined by IPPF [International Planned Parenthood Federation]”

15+

“acceptance and celebration of sexual differences”

“violation of sexual rights”

“right to abortion”

¹⁹ WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A framework for policy-makers, educational and health authorities and specialists*, (Cologne, 2010).

A highly influential “comprehensive sexuality programme” is “It’s All One Curriculum”, which has been produced by the Population Council, with the collaboration of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. This programme, which is in use in at least 150 countries worldwide, and in all 50 US states, promotes destructive and immoral practices, including abortion, contraception, prostitution, homosexual acts, and masturbation.²⁰

Implementation of the call in the SDGs for “universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education” by 2030 will lead to increased numbers of children being subjected to programmes which threaten their healthy physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual development.

5. The SDGs have been endorsed by Pope Francis

On 1 September 2016 Pope Francis stated, in his message “For the celebration of the world day of prayer for the care of creation”, that he was “gratified that in September 2015 the nations of the world adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, and that, in December 2015, they approved the Paris Agreement on climate change.” During his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September 2015, shortly before the SDGs were formally adopted, he had said “The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope”.²¹

The Holy Father had previously given support to the Paris Agreement, which was approved by nation states on 12 December 2015. The Paris Agreement welcomes the Sustainable Development Goals and states that “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights”, which are considered, in this agreement, to include “gender equality” and “empowerment of women”. Goal 5 of the SDGs defines these terms as including “universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights”. On 13 December, after the Angelus in St Peter’s Square, Pope Francis called for “unanimous agreement” in “implementing” the Paris Agreement. He continued: “I exhort the whole international community to proceed on the path undertaken in the name of an ever more effective solidarity.”

6. The Sustainable Development Goals have received support from other organs of the Holy See

On 25 May 2016 Archbishop Jean-Marie Mupendawatu, of the Pontifical Council of Healthcare Workers, made an intervention at the World Health Assembly in Geneva in which he stated, without referring to any reservations, that the Holy See welcomed the SDGs. This intervention is contrary to the position adopted by the Holy See delegation at New York,

²⁰ Population Council, *It’s All One Curriculum: Guidelines and Activities for a Unified Approach to Sexuality, Gender, HIV, and Human Rights Education*, (New York, 2009).

²¹ Pope Francis, *Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 25 September 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html, [Accessed 22 December 2016].

which issued a statement of reservations at the time of the approval of the SDGs at the General Assembly in New York in September 2015. In his speech he said:

“The implementation of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 goals and 169 associated targets will ensure the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally viable future for our planet and for present and future generations. The Holy See delegation welcomes the vital emphasis on the dignity of the human person and the strong focus on equity expressed in the pledge that ‘no one will be left behind’. This in terms of health is expressed in goal 3, to 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', which has 13 targets that are underpinned by universal coverage as the key to the achievement of all the others.”

The Sustainable Development Goals have also been consistently supported by the Pontifical Academy of Science and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Examples of this support include:

- On 29 April 2015 the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences issued a joint statement welcoming the SDGs, even though the draft goals called for “universal sexual and reproductive health and rights”. The statement, which was released following a conference on sustainable development, was co-authored by Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Margaret Archer, the President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, special advisor to UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon, Professor Hans Schellenhuber, a climate scientist, and other academics.
- Professor Jeffrey Sachs headed the Sustainable Solutions Network, which played a central role in drafting the SDGs. In his book *The Age of Sustainable Development*, published in March 2015, Sachs argued for reducing the birth rate in Africa, and called for governments to encourage their populations to lower family size by promoting birth control and providing access to free or low-cost contraception and family planning.²² In 2011 he called for the Nigerian government “to work towards attaining a maximum of three children [per family].”²³ His 2008 book, *Commonwealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, argued that abortion was a cost-effective way to eliminate “unwanted children” and reduce a country’s total fertility rates “by as much as half a child on average.”²⁴ Jeffrey Sachs has taken part in at least ten events at the Vatican during the current pontificate and has had a private audience with Pope Francis. Professor

²² Jeffrey Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development*, Kindle Edition, (2015), p159.

²³ “Nigeria population: Sachs' three-baby plan 'tricky'”, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 24 May 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13530649>, [Accessed 19 December 2017].

²⁴ Jeffrey Sachs, *Commonwealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, Kindle Edition (2011), p189-90.

Margaret Archer has stated that she spent “hours” working with Jeffrey Sachs to draft new inclusions for the proposed Sustainable Development Goals.²⁵

- Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo responded to criticism regarding the collaboration of the Pontifical Academies with Jeffrey Sachs by downplaying the connection between “sexual and reproductive health” and abortion and contraception. He told Stefano Gennarini, a pro-life campaigner, that “we had these discussions, and as you can see, the draft SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) don’t even mention abortion or population control. They speak of access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. The interpretation and application of these depends on governments.”²⁶ Yet, as we have demonstrated above, United Nations’ bodies, and many national governments, define these terms as including contraception and abortion. Thus the inclusion of these terms threatens to lead to major expansion of provision of abortion and contraception, as also explained above.
- From 13-15 November 2015 the Pontifical Academy of Science and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences hosted a workshop entitled “Children and Sustainable Development: A Challenge for Education”. The workshop discussed how to “use children as agents of change” to pursue sustainable development. The danger to children is quite apparent from the briefing’s assertion that schools “will have to absorb the UN Sustainable Development Goals, proclaimed in the fall of 2015”.²⁷ This would suggest that schools will have to teach about the SDGs, including the calls for “universal access for sexual and reproductive health”. The briefing paper for the workshop also stated that in some countries “parents and maybe official agencies, basing themselves on religious principles, oppose scientific evidence to the detriment of children”. This risks undermining the right of parents to transmit their religious beliefs to their children and to protect their children from the imposition of the ideology behind the SDGs.

At the time of writing, leading population control advocate Paul Ehrlich is scheduled to speak at an event organised by the PAS and PASS, entitled “Biological Extinction”, which will be held from 27 February to 1 March 2017. Ehrlich is an outspoken supporter of abortion, sterilisation, and contraception. Ehrlich is best known for his 1968 work *The Population Bomb*, in which he falsely predicted that hundreds of millions of people would starve to death in the 1970s, including 65 million Americans. In reality, the population of the earth has doubled since 1968, without any of the catastrophic consequences predicted by Ehrlich

²⁵ Professor Margaret Archer, “PASS President Margaret Archer's reply to First Things”, *End Slavery*, http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/getinvolved/contributions/archer_reply.html, [Accessed 20 December 2016].

²⁶ Stefano Gennarini, “Vatican prelate dismisses criticism over partnership with pro-abortion population controllers”, *LifeSiteNews*, 20 May 2015, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/vatican-prelate-dismisses-criticism-over-partnership-with-pro-abortion-popu>, [Accessed 20 December 2016].

²⁷ Pontifical Academy of Sciences, *Children and Sustainable Development: A Challenge for Education*, briefing paper produced for workshop 13-15 November 2015, http://www.casinapioiv.va/content/dam/accademia/booklet/booklet_children.pdf, [Accessed 20 December 2016].

occurring.²⁸ Ehrlich has argued that “compulsory population-control laws, even including laws requiring compulsory abortion, could be sustained under the existing [US] Constitution if the population crisis became sufficiently severe to endanger the society.”²⁹ In an interview in 2011 he defended sex-selective abortion, stating that:

“It would be a good idea to let people have their choice so that they could have fewer children and could have what they wanted.”³⁰

He also suggested that girls were often better off being killed in the womb than being born:

“You can be aborted as a conceptus, you can be killed at birth, or you can be sold into slavery and die in a slum some place... It would be interesting to know how many females you’re keeping out of hideous situations – the ones who are not killed or infanticided but nonetheless not valued.”³¹

The interviewer reported that on the same occasion Ehrlich defended “the basic thinking behind mass reversible sterilization” in which everybody would be sterilised and then be permitted to have the process reversed if they fulfilled certain criteria. Ehrlich said:

“If I could wave a wand now and say, we’re going to have a system where everybody has to do X in order to have a kid, and it will be a fail-safe, we’d solve a lot of the things that disturb people the most.”³²

In 2013 he expressed the view that “Giving people the right to have as many children that they want is, I think, a bad idea... Nobody, in my view, has the right to have 12 children or even three unless the second pregnancy is twins.”³³ He also recently said that allowing women to have as many children as they want is akin to allowing them to “throw as much of their garbage into their neighbor’s backyard as they want.”³⁴ In 2014 he stated that the much of the western world was run by “the big unethical monotheisms” and that “the most unethical thing going on now with one of the monotheisms, Catholicism, is opposition to the use of contraception. The main source of that is the Vatican and its bishops.” He continued by stating that “God-fearing people” were “working to kill people” by opposing abortion, and

²⁸ Clyde Haberman, “The Unrealized Horrors of Population Explosion”, *New York Times*, 31 May 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/us/the-unrealized-horrors-of-population-explosion.html?_r=2, [Accessed 20 January 2017].

²⁹ Paul Ehrlich, Anne Ehrlich & John Holdren, *Ecoscience: Population, Resources, Environment*, (1977), p280.

³⁰ Mara Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls and the Consequences of a World Full of Men*, (New York, 2011), p108.

³¹ Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection*, p109.

³² Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection*, p108.

³³ Kay Steiger, “‘Population Bomb’ scientist: ‘Nobody’ has the right to ‘as many children as they want’”, *Raw Story*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.rawstory.com/2013/01/population-bomb-scientist-nobody-has-the-right-to-as-many-children-as-they-want/>, [3 February 2017].

³⁴ Clyde Haberman, “The Unrealized Horrors of Population Explosion”, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/us/the-unrealized-horrors-of-population-explosion.html?_r=0, [Accessed 3 February 2017].

that “the pope and many of the bishops are one of the truly evil, regressive forces on the planet, in my opinion, interested primarily in maintaining their power.”³⁵

Paul Ehrlich’s support for abortion and sterilisation, including openness to forced abortion and compulsory sterilisation, as well as his open hostility to the Catholic Church and her pastors, make it completely unacceptable that the Pontifical Academy for Science and the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences should give him a platform of this kind.

7. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* asserts that there is “A Need for Sex Education” but only in the context of “educational institutions”

Amoris Laetitia includes a section entitled “The Need for Sex Education” (paragraphs 280-286). This section does not make any reference to the role of parents in educating their children in the area of sexuality. On the other hand the exhortation does make reference to “educational institutions”. Yet, according to Catholic teaching, sex education is “a basic right and duty of parents” which “must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them.”³⁶ *Amoris Laetitia* does make a brief reference to the general rights of parents in an earlier chapter (paragraph 84) but the omission of any reference to parental rights over sex education in a section dedicated to asserting the “need for sex education”, in the context of “educational institutions”, is a grave omission that seriously fails parents at a time when parental rights regarding sex education are under serious and sustained attack in many nations of the world, and at the international institutions, as explained above.

It is difficult to see how the approach adopted in *Amoris Laetitia* can be reconciled with that expressed by the Holy See in the 1995 document *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*. Speaking of education in “the value of sexuality and chastity” the document states:

“In this context, based on the teaching of the Church and with her support, parents must reclaim their own task... For education to correspond to the objective needs of true love, parents should provide this education within their own autonomous responsibility.”³⁷

The document goes on to teach that:

“Each child is a unique and unrepeatable person and must receive individualized formation. Since parents know, understand and love each of their children in their uniqueness, they are in the best position to decide what the appropriate time is for providing a variety of information, according to their children’s physical and spiritual growth. No one can take this capacity for discernment away from conscientious parents.

³⁵ Paul Ehrlich & Michael Tobias, *Hope on Earth: A Conversation*, (Chicago, 2014).

³⁶ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (1981) No. 37.

³⁷ Lopez Cardinal Trujillo/Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 24.

“Each child's process of maturation as a person is different. Therefore, the most intimate aspects, whether biological or emotional, should be communicated in a personalized dialogue. In their dialogue with each child, with love and trust, parents communicate something about their own self-giving which makes them capable of giving witness to aspects of the emotional dimension of sexuality that could not be transmitted in other ways.”³⁸

In normal circumstances sex education ought to be provided by parents and in the home:

“The family environment is thus the normal and usual place for forming children and young people to consolidate and exercise the virtues of charity, temperance, fortitude and chastity. As the domestic church, the family is the school of the richest humanity. This is particularly true for the moral and spiritual education on such a delicate matter as chastity... If in fact parents do not give adequate formation in chastity, they are failing in their precise duty. Likewise, they would also be guilty were they to tolerate immoral or inadequate formation being given to their children outside the home.”³⁹

Children have the right to receive sex education from their parents. The Church upholds:

“... the right of the child and the young person to be adequately informed by their own parents on moral and sexual questions in a way that complies with his or her desire to be chaste and to be formed in chastity. This right is further qualified by a child's stage of development, his or her capacity to integrate moral truth with sexual information, and by respect for his or her innocence and tranquility.”⁴⁰

There are some, limited, circumstances in which sex education can be delivered by other individuals, or where other individuals can assist in its delivery:

“Other educators can assist in this task, but they can only take the place of parents for serious reasons of physical or moral incapacity.”⁴¹

Furthermore:

“In certain situations, parents can entrust part of education for love to another trustworthy person, if there are matters which require a specific competence or pastoral care in particular cases.”⁴²

However, as stated above, because sex education “is a basic right and duty of parents” it “must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centres chosen and controlled by them.”⁴³

³⁸ *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 65 & 66.

³⁹ *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 48.

⁴⁰ *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 119.

⁴¹ *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 23.

⁴² *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 132.

It is important to stress here that *Amoris Laetitia* is speaking about the discussion of sexual matters in the classroom (and usually in mixed classrooms) as Pope Francis does not indicate anywhere in this section that sex education will be carried out anywhere other than in “educational institutions”. This means that even passages that might otherwise be welcome take on a troubling aspect.

For example, in paragraph 280 of *Amoris Laetitia* we read that:

“Sex education should provide information while keeping in mind that children and young people have not yet attained full maturity. The information has to come at a proper time and in a way suited to their age. It is not helpful to overwhelm them with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality.”⁴⁴

In and of itself, this is a welcome affirmation. However, in this context it seems that it is “educational institutions” that Pope Francis foresees imparting the information mentioned above. This would be contrary to the teaching of the Church, which, as we have seen, specifies that it is for parents, not “educational institutions” to impart explicit information about sexual matters to their children, at the time, and in the manner, that they consider most appropriate. In any case, we have already seen, above, what degrading material is considered age-appropriate for young children, by those bodies that set the “standards” for sexuality education.

Amoris Laetitia does offer some criticisms of modern sex education (cf. paragraph 283) but these consistently fail to express the extent and gravity of the threat posed to children’s health and psychological, intellectual and spiritual development. We must also note here that the emphasis on sex education as a means to assist young people to deal with problems such as pornography, is a strategy often deployed by the sex education lobby to convince decision makers and the general public that modern “comprehensive sex education” programmes are necessary. Paragraph 281 of *Amoris Laetitia* is unfortunately open to being interpreted in this manner.

Given the nature of modern sex education it is gravely concerning that there is not a single mention of chastity in *Amoris Laetitia*’s treatment of sex education. Indeed, there is only one direct reference to chastity in the entirety of the document.⁴⁵ This is a very different approach to that adopted in *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, which mentions chastity seventy-four times and stresses that teaching about chastity must be at the heart of any discussion of sex education.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 37.

⁴⁴ *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 280.

⁴⁵ *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 206. Chastity is mentioned here with reference to marriage preparation.

⁴⁶ *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, No. 22.

8. The Pontifical Council for Family has produced a sex education programme that contains obscene images that have been described as constituting “sexual abuse of children”

The Pontifical Council for the Family has, since the promulgation of *Amoris Laetitia*, published its own sex education programme, which contains material which violates Catholic teaching on sexuality education. The Vatican programme, entitled “The Meeting Point”, exposes children to obscene and pornographic images.⁴⁷ This programme, which is intended to be taught in mixed classroom settings, was launched by the PCF at World Youth Day in Krakow in July 2016.

Serious problems with the programme have been identified by Dr Rick Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist and adjunct professor of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, at the Catholic University of America. Dr Fitzgibbons has provided us with the following analysis:

“In recent years, the Catholic Church has been going through one of her most severe crises as a result of the priestly abuse of youth. The primary victims have been adolescent males.⁴⁸

...

“In order to restore the severely damaged trust and faith in the laity, it is incumbent upon the members of the Hierarchy and priests that they never again act as permissive leaders/shepherds when serious threats are posed to the moral, intellectual, psychological, and sexual well-being of youth.

“As a psychiatrist, I have worked extensively with Catholic youth severely harmed psychologically by the divorce of their parents,⁴⁹ frequently enabled by ‘easy’ annulments of their parents’ sacramental marriages, in disregard for justice, mercy and psychological science,⁵⁰ and by the epidemics of narcissism,⁵¹ marijuana,⁵² pornography,⁵³ and sexual

⁴⁷ WARNING: EXPLICIT IMAGERY The images can be found at “What’s in the Vatican’s new sex-ed program?”, 27 July 2016, *LifeSiteNews.com*, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/media/whats-in-the-vaticans-sex-ed>, [Accessed 7 December 2016].

⁴⁸ Fitzgibbons, R. & O’Leary, D. “Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Clergy”, *The Linacre Quarterly* 78(3) (August 2011): 252–273.

⁴⁹ Fitzgibbons, R. (2016) Forthcoming: “Children of Divorce: Conflicts and Healing” in Margaret McCarthy (ed.), *Torn Asunder: Children, the Myth of the Good Divorce and the Recovery of Origins*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 51-65.

⁵⁰ Fitzgibbons R. (2015). Quick and Easy Annulments Pose Grave Risks to the Family. Retrieved from <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/dr.-rick-fitzgibbons-quick-and-easy-annulme...>; Adkins, J. et al. (2015). Remember our Children. *America*, November 12, 2015.

⁵¹ Twenge, J., & Campbell, W. K. (2009). *The narcissism epidemic: Living in the age of entitlement*. New York, NY: Aria Books.

⁵² Fitzgibbons, R. (2016). Retrieved from www.childhealing.com/The-Addicted-Spouse-and-Child-Healing.

⁵³ Kleponis, P. (2014) *Integrity Restored: A Catholic Guide to Pornography*. Steubenville: Emmaus Road, p. 19.

hooking up⁵⁴ (using others as sexual objects), and the enormous peer pressure to be sexually active, and suffering the psychological conflicts in their parents, siblings, and peers.⁵⁵

“However, in my professional opinion, the most dangerous threat to Catholic youth that I have seen over the past 40 years is the Vatican’s new sexual education program, *The Meeting Point: Course of Affective Sexual Education for Young People*.

“*The Meeting Point* was released at World Youth Day in Poland by the Pontifical Council of the Family then under the direction of Archbishop Paglia and is now available online, for free, in five different languages.

...

“In a culture in which youth are bombarded by pornography, I was particularly shocked by the images contained in this new sex education program, some of which are clearly pornographic. My immediate professional reaction was that this obscene or pornographic approach abuses youth psychologically and spiritually.

“Youth are also harmed by the failure to warn them of the long-term dangers of promiscuous behaviors and contraceptive use.⁵⁶ As a professional who has treated both priest perpetrators and the victims of the abuse crisis in the Church, what I found particularly troubling was that the pornographic images in this program are similar to those used by adult sexual predators of adolescents.

“The person primarily responsible for the development and release of this harmful program, Archbishop Paglia, the former leader of the Pontifical Council of the Family, should be required in justice to go through an evaluation by a review board as described in the *Dallas Charter* norms for placing youth at risk. Such a review is particularly important as he is now been put in charge of further teaching regarding sexuality and marriage at the John Paul II Institute for Family Studies.

“*The Meeting Point* program constitutes sexual abuse of Catholic adolescents worldwide and reveals an ignorance of the enormous sexual pressure upon youth today and will result in their subsequent confusion in accepting the Church’s teaching. It represents a grave future crisis in the Church and particularly for Catholic youth and families in far greater proportions than the scandalous sexual abuse crisis of youth recently so widely reported in the press.”

⁵⁴ Grossman, M. (2007). *Unprotected: A Campus Psychiatrist Reveals How Political Correctness in Her Profession Endangers Every Student*. St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel.

⁵⁵ Enright, R., & Fitzgibbons, R. (2014). *Forgiveness therapy: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Books, pp. 171-202.

⁵⁶ Fitzgibbons, R. (2015). Retrieved from www.thecatholicthing.org/2015/01/29/contraceptions-cascading-rampage.

The Pontifical Council for the Family's programme contains material which bears a resemblance to that contained in programmes promoted at the United Nations' under the title of "comprehensive sexuality education". While it does not advocate for immoral practices such as contraception and homosexual acts, it does pursue an approach towards sexuality education that is contrary to the long established teaching of the Church and which will negatively impact on the healthy development of children. The teaching of *Amoris Laetitia*, and the practice of the PCF, reflect the increasing alignment of Vatican authorities with the agenda being pursued at the international institutions.

Conclusions

Children, born and unborn, are gravely threatened by the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations in September 2015. The coming years will witness sustained assault on the right to life of unborn children and on the rights of children to receive an authentic education in sexuality. The approval of the SDGs by Pope Francis and other organs of the Holy See greatly increases the threat to the most innocent and vulnerable amongst us. It is absolutely necessary for all Catholics to resist, in the manner most appropriate to their position with the Church, this alignment between ecclesiastical authorities and an international agenda that pursues the destruction of innocent life and of the very structure of the family.

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Society for the Protection of Unborn Children

3 February 2017