

**Statement by Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll, Provincial Leader,
Society of African Missions, Cork.**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children has now published the findings of its Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Society of African Missions (SMA). This Review was conducted at the invitation of the SMA. The full report is available on our website www.sma.ie

The purpose of the review was twofold; to assess how the SMA manages complaints/concerns about sexual abuse in relation to any of its members and to review the SMA structures and processes for safeguarding children.

The review of the SMA confirms the good work done by the Society of African Missions in having strong policies and robust procedures in place which ensure that our day to day work demonstrates our determination to guarantee the safety of children. This remains a priority for all good women and men and for each member of the SMA. If past history has taught us anything, it must be that we have to remain vigilant in our concern for children and their safety and that child protection is always a work in progress that needs support and review from within the church and our Society and from without.

While we have worked closely with the National Board on a number of individual cases and have sought their advice on a number of occasions, this is the first opportunity we have had to have all our files and processes reviewed by the National Board. We have worked hard over many years to ensure that our ministry protects and engages with young people. Where this has not happened, we have sought to reach out to those who were hurt or abused by any of our members.

We found the process of the review to be a constructive one which has brought greater clarity to our work in this area. Guaranteeing the safety of children is an on-going priority for the SMA. We welcome the report of the National Board and we have already begun working on foot of the recommendations made in their report. The majority of these recommendations relate to policies or procedures which though they are in place and are used, are not formally recorded in writing. All of these recommendations have been adopted and work has begun to ensure that each of the standards in question will be fully met. We have found this process to be of huge assistance and we look forward to working towards similar future, independent reviews.

In concrete terms, we welcome the finding that all cases have been reported to the Gardaí/PSNI and the HSE/HSCE, that when concerns were raised, the priest involved was removed from ministry. We welcome also the findings in relation to our engagement with and outreach to victims of abuse. The National Board's report highlights that in SMA parishes the protocols laid out for dioceses are being adhered to and this in turn assures best policy and best practice. The National Board also reviewed policies and practices in our retreat and conference centre in Dromantine,

Co. Down where children's camps are held each summer. Their report indicates that both policy and practice in Dromantine are of the highest standards as required in National Board policy and procedure documents and also that there is a special emphasis in Dromantine on the safeguarding of children.

I take this opportunity to reiterate that I abhor the fact of child abuse and I abhor specifically that anyone has been abused by one of our members. I would like to take this opportunity to again apologise for any hurt caused by any member of the SMA. The SMA is outward looking in respect to its responsibilities. We have always worked hard to reach out to victims and will continue to do so. I once again invite anyone, who has not already come forward, who has been abused by a member of the SMA to contact me.

I commend the National Board for its determination to fulfil the objective of devising and overseeing the implementation of best practice in safeguarding children throughout the Church.