

# SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS OF MERCY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Mercy International Association (MIA) recognises and upholds the dignity and rights of all children and vulnerable adults. We are committed to ensuring their safety and well-being. MIA fosters an environment characterised by truth, trust and transparency, a culture in which people experience safety. We will work in partnership with parents and guardians (where appropriate) to achieve safety and well-being for all who interact with MIA. We recognise each child as a gift from God and God's special care for vulnerable persons of any age. We value and encourage the participation of children and vulnerable adults in all activities that enhances their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development.






The Association (MIA) has as its members groups of Sisters of Mercy from around the world. MIA is not a constituent member of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Nonetheless its members are all Institutes of Pontifical Right within the Catholic Church. MIA therefore adopts and fully endorses the policy statements and standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland as publicly available through the website [www.safeguarding.ie](http://www.safeguarding.ie) and gives full support to the work of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

All MIA personnel including clergy, religious, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to safeguard the welfare, health and development of children and vulnerable adults in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interests and prevents abuse.

## Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

### Nature of services involving Children and Vulnerable Adults

MIA Ministries which are for children or potentially involve children and vulnerable adults:

-  House Tours – real or virtual
-  Young Mercy Leaders programmes or similar events aimed at young people
-  Visits to Mercy International Centre by class groups from schools
-  Events at Mercy International Association
-  Accommodation - Bed and Breakfast (children are not accommodated)

### Principles to Safeguard Children and Vulnerable Adults from Harm

As outlined in the *Safeguarding Children 2016 Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland* (which MIA adopts) and *The Children First Act 2015* we are committed to the following principles:

#### 1. Mandatory Reporting

Each of us has a duty to notify the statutory authorities of suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of abuse:

- physically
- emotionally
- sexually
- through neglect

Suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations may relate to possible abuse by a member of MIA personnel, but they can also relate to incidents in the abused person's family, or elsewhere in the community.

## **2. Caring for the welfare of all Children and Vulnerable Adults and the Adults who work with them**

Measures to create and maintain environments that are safe for children, that prevent abuse, and that create nurturing, caring conditions within MIA for children and the adults who work with them, will continue to be strengthened and reviewed. This will be done through training support, communications and quality assurance.

## **3. Responding appropriately to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of abuse**

Anyone who brings any suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child or vulnerable adult to the notice of MIA will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner, in line with statutory child protection procedures of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

All suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that reach the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities will be reported to the appropriate statutory authorities. This will be done irrespective of the status of the person (lay, cleric or religious) who is suspected of having been abusive to a child or vulnerable adult. If the allegation relates to a lay member of MIA staff, in addition to notifying the statutory authorities, if the allegation concerns a child, it must be reported to the relevant Church Authority. If this allegation relates to a cleric or religious, in addition to notifying the statutory authorities, the allegation must also be reported to the relevant Church authority and the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

All MIA personnel will cooperate with the statutory authorities in all cases.

In responding to complaints of child sexual abuse relating to clergy and all those in forms of consecrated life, MIA authorities will act in accordance with the requirements of civil law and canon law, and so will respect the rights and uphold the safeguards afforded in these, both to the complainant and respondent.

## **4. Caring pastorally for complainants and other affected persons**

Those who have suffered abuse by MIA personnel will receive a compassionate and just response, and will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support as they seek to rebuild their lives. An appropriate pastoral response to the family (of a child), parish, congregation or order and to the wider community will be provided, with due regard to the right to privacy of those directly involved, and to the administration of justice.

## **5. Caring pastorally for respondents and other affected persons**

MIA in its response to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of child or vulnerable adult sexual abuse will respect the rights under civil law and canon law of an accused cleric or religious or other MIA personnel. A legal presumption of innocence will be maintained during the statutory and Church inquiry processes. As the processes develop, additional assessment, therapy and support services may be offered to the respondent.

MIA will work with the appropriate Church authority to take responsibility for ensuring that any cleric or religious who is considered to constitute a danger to children is managed according to a risk management plan.

All requisite steps will be taken to restore the good name and reputation of anyone who has been wrongly accused of abusing a child.

Respondents belong to families and diocesan or religious communities: MIA will be mindful of the need to provide support to members of families and communities affected by the respondent's changed situation.

This statement has been prepared to comply with the requirements of the *Children's First act 2015* and is derived from the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016* (National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, NBS CCCI). It has been extended to encompass concern for Vulnerable Adults.

