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Cardinal's personal statement, 20 November 2020

On Tuesday 10 November I received the IICSA Report. It has brought together a picture of abuse inflicted in the Catholic Church over a period of 50 years, together with detailed accounts of that abuse. It is a terrible picture. I remain shocked and ashamed. It is a reality that hangs like a dark cloud over my heart and mind.

I know that the publication of the Report has renewed in so many the lasting pain and wounds they carry as a result of that abuse, no matter how long ago it happened. My first thoughts were and are for them. Indeed, many have written to me in these last days. To each and every one, I express my profound sorrow and apologies.

Abuse is a terrible wickedness. It can destroy, or severely damage, a person's capacity for trust and love. It can create of a life an empty shell. One letter I received from a survivor speaks eloquently of its deepest wickedness. She writes that, in the eyes of faith, these are wounds inflicted on the very Body of Jesus Christ, and inflicted by a person who claims to represent Christ and who uses faith, that most precious gift, as a means of controlling their victim. It is a very terrible evil.

I have spent many hours listening to survivors. I have sat and talked with them, shared meals with them and wept with them. Nothing removes from my soul the horror of what has happened to them. I will continue to listen to survivors: hearing them is a humbling and learning experience for me.

I say again: I am so sorry. I say this for many bishops who have gone before me over these 50 years. Many hearing this will feel that we let you down. Yes, we did let you down in many ways, in different times, in different places, for different reasons. I apologise again. I am so sorry for all that has happened over these years.

In these last few days, I have received many letters expressing anger and disgust at what has taken place. I have also received many more letters and messages of respect, support, esteem and encouragement for my continuing ministry. I cannot remove the damage that has been inflicted, but I can tell you that I hear clearly and feel keenly the content and impact of this Report, the messages from survivors, from the public and from so many of the faithful. I take them all to heart.

With profound feelings of both pain and support I came on Monday to our bishops' meeting. I came to be with my fellow bishops, united as we are, in a common life-long commitment, to a ministry we have been given, in a love for this Church of sinners. I came to continue as their President, to guide and lead our work, to press ahead with the work we have done and are to bring into action, including and beyond the IICSA Report.

Yes, now I look to the future, to the renewal of our work of safeguarding and our response to survivors. There is new work to tell you about, new recommendations for action, shaped by the survivors who work with us and guide us, who give us the fruit of their suffering and wisdom. I thank them, as I thank everyone who works in this important ministry in our parishes and dioceses. Our commitment is strong and refreshed.

And now I hand over the Archbishop Malcolm who will report to you on the work of our Bishops' Conference. He will outline the measures on which we are fully agreed in order to revitalise our work of safeguarding, in order to correct our failings and build something better and stronger for the future. We pray that implementing these measures will help to restore the faith of our people and ensure respect and dignity for every person.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster