



**U.S. Catholic Sisters
Against Human Trafficking**
Ending Slavery Is Everyone's Work

July 30 is the WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Please join the Coalition of Catholic Organizations against Human Trafficking CCOAHT, U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking USCSAHT in our campaign to draw attention to human trafficking and to protect our children!

Background on the Letter to Attorney General Barr

Child online sexual exploitation is rampant. As with all pandemics, online sexual abuse of children is not easy to detect, threatens lives, especially of the most vulnerable, and if unaddressed, will have daunting and irreversible impacts on families and society. In 2019, the [New York Times](#) reported in a series of articles on this crime, that 45 million photos and videos of children being exploited, tortured, and abused were uploaded to the internet during the previous year. Some of these children were as young as infants and toddlers. Furthermore, as the Times as well as other human rights groups have noted, the market for these images is growing as children spend increasing amounts of time online.

The US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking denounces this horrific crime against children and is calling upon Attorney General Barr to exercise his responsibilities, listed below, under the Protect Our Children Act of 2008. Since online predators are among the most technologically adept of all criminals, it is urgent that we equip our law enforcement agencies with what they need to identify child predators and bring them to justice.

How this can be done.

The Protect our Children Act enacted in 2008 and reauthorized by the 115th Congress (2017-19), is a law which focus on preventing online child exploitation and prosecuting those responsible for this crime. This legislation requires a strategic and coordinated campaign across many jurisdictions so that offenders can be identified and children can be protected from stalking and other forms of harmful abuse. The Attorney General's role with respect to this legislation is to review, update, and implement strategies *every two years* that are necessary to support the effectiveness of our nation's response to online exploitation of children. However, since 2008, the Department of Justice has provided only two such reports.

Since our capacity to confront and dismantle the increasingly sophisticated tools and techniques used by predators online is related to the needs that are identified in regular reporting by DOJ, our enforcement agencies are under-funded and under-resourced in their work. The DOJ's inattention to this crisis has left our children at higher risk for becoming victims of the most heinous of crimes.

If we are to be effective in protecting our children from predators, the Attorney General must assume his responsibilities under the Protect our Children Act of 2008.

Hon. William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

As our nation continues to battle the pandemic of the coronavirus, I hope that this letter finds you and your family in good health.

I am writing to you to express concern, and request your action regarding another pandemic which is devastating millions of lives—the online sexual exploitation of children.

As the [New York Times](#) reported in its 2019 coverage on this crime, over 45 million photos and videos of children being sexually exploited and tortured were uploaded in 2018. These represent an exponential growth in the demand for content that portrays the sexual abuse and torture of children, many of whom are infants and toddlers. More recently, during this time of school closures and online learning, [Homeland Security](#) has noted an uptick of online predatory behavior toward children. [ECPAT](#), an organization dedicated to ending child trafficking, points out that online predators are adept at using the most updated technology to conduct their crimes. Similarly, they are able to hide within the far reaches and darkest corners of the World Wide Web. Without adequate protection, every child who uses the internet is a potential victim.

We have laws, such as the Protect Our Children Act of 2008 (S. 1738), which created a national strategy to identify and prosecute those responsible for child online sexual trafficking. However, in order to be effective, this law requires oversight by the Department of Justice, (DOJ). It was noted in the abovementioned New York Times report, as well as in a subsequent letter to you by Congresswoman Wassermann-Shultz, (August 2019), that the DOJ has been deficient in exercising its responsibilities with respect to the required oversight of this law.

Law enforcement and other groups who have dedicated themselves to finding and prosecuting online child traffickers, have testified that they are under-resourced for their work to end this egregious crime ([NYT article](#)). Your Department's oversight of the Task Forces created under the Protect Our Children Act of 2008 includes recommending adequate funding, as well as effective strategies that these Task Forces require to stop child online trafficking. The DOJ has not exercised due diligence. Its failure to send regular reports to Congress has led to a failure of funding. Without adequate DOJ attention and oversight, as required by law, this crime will continue to escalate and perpetrators will continue to act with impunity. The consequences of this for innocent children are unspeakable.

I join the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, (letter from April 30, 2020), in urging you to confront child online exploitation and the proliferation of pornography, which scars human dignity and violates the inherent rights of human beings, especially our vulnerable children. As those who have dedicated ourselves to promoting human rights and dignity, including ending human trafficking in all its forms, we urge you to create a more robust response to the horror of online sexual exploitation of children, by directing your Department to fully implement the responsibilities entrusted to you in the Protect Our Children Act of 2008.

I ask you to please advise us to the steps you plan to take to address these concerns.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,