

Amnesty International slams Irish Catholic Church on abuse

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) A new report by the Irish branch of Amnesty International says the sexual abuse of children by Ireland's Roman Catholic priests "included acts that amounted to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment."

The 430-page report, released Monday (Sept. 26), "reminds us that Irish children were subjected to treatment that would be horrifying if it were done to prisoners of war, never mind little boys and girls," said Ireland's Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, in Dublin.

The study is a response to four major government probes of clerical sex abuse in the Catholic Church conducted since 2003. Those investigations revealed widespread child abuse over several decades by clergy and members of religious orders, leading to the resignations of three bishops.

The most recent government report, published in July, concluded that child protection policies established by Irish church leaders in 1996 were "not fully or consistently implemented" in the diocese of Cloyne, where sexual abuse allegations against priests were made as late as 2009.

The Vatican launched its own investigation of clerical sex abuse in

Ireland last November, which has finished its "first phase." A published report of its findings might not appear until next year.

In May, Amnesty International accused the Holy See of falling short of its treaty commitments to protect children from sex abuse. Separately, abuse victims have filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court that seeks to hold Pope Benedict XVI and others responsible for the "systematic and widespread concealing of rape and child sex crimes throughout the world."