

The full extent of the regressive nature of the Vatican under Ratzinger was made clear this week when it was revealed that the Vatican had opposed two United Nations resolutions aimed at protecting gay and disabled people from discrimination and death.

When France proposed a resolution seeking all nations to decriminalise homosexuality, the Vatican immediately said it would oppose the resolution. This is despite the fact that up to 70 nations still have legal punishments for gay people including, in some instances, the death penalty. In a number of Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen, homosexual acts are still a capital offence.

A strongly worded editorial in Italy's mainstream La Stampa newspaper said the Vatican's reasoning was "grotesque".

Franco Grillini, founder and honorary president of Arcigay, Italy's leading gay rights group, said the Vatican's reasoning smacked of "total idiocy and madness". Mr Grillini said the resolution had nothing to do with gay marriage, but was aimed at stopping the execution of gay people in Islamic countries.

An editorial in Rome's left-leaning La Repubblica newspaper said the Vatican's position "leaves one dumbstruck". Margherita Boniver, a leading member of Italy's leftist Democratic Party, called it "alarmingly anachronistic".

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