



MEDIA RELEASE

Religious and Secular Groups Come Together to End Violence Against Children

New York, 29 November 2012 – The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children celebrated its fifth Day of Prayer on Universal Children’s Day (20 November 2012) by bringing together secular and faith-based organizations to work to end violence against children, particularly child marriage.

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children was created in 2008 to be a day of reflection and a call to action for the well being of children around the world. Although its activities culminate in November, the World Day has grown into an organization that works all year, weaving together the efforts of faith-based and non-governmental organizations with those of governments around the world.

This year, the World Day was the catalyst for close to 100 activities in over 50 countries which were held around the world in late November. The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children was even celebrated at the top of the world in Nepal, where the Shanti Seva Ashram arranged an interfaith campaign to “Stop Child Marriage.”

Ending child marriage, which is often associated with violence against girls, is a major goal of the World Day, which is also campaigning against violent child discipline and promoting universal birth registration. It is also a major goal of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of The Elders, founders of Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage.

“Every year, more than 10 million girls are married as children, usually with little say in whom and when they will marry,” said Archbishop Tutu a few days before this year’s Day of Prayer. “They enter a union in which they are likely to suffer violence and abuse, and which can cause untold psychological harm. Child marriage denies girls their rights to education and health, and makes it almost impossible for them to lift themselves, their families and communities out of poverty.”

In India, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and the Shanti Ashram organized seven days of workshops and school campaigns (from 14 November to 21 November) to promote the protection of children and prevent early marriage. The events brought together leaders from a variety of faiths, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and the Baha’i tradition.

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University in West Bengal arranged a seven-day series of seminars on children’s rights, the prevention of early marriage and the trafficking of children. The seminars, which were held in cities and villages, were run in collaboration with 150 youth clubs and 600 schools. More than 25,000 children participated in the events, which went from 14 November to 20 November.

In Bangladesh, Save the Children worked with a local NGO called Breaking the Silence to create a daylong rally, calling for the prevention of violence against children. The event brought together nearly 200 children and 200 religious and civic leaders.

Such collaboration was seen around the world. In Liberia, the Inter Religious Council held a Candle Lighting event to celebrate The World Day, which brought together the Liberia Council of Churches, the Liberia National Muslim Council, the National Child Protection Network and various ministries of the Liberian government.

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, UNICEF, religious organizations and local government brought together more than 2,000 Christian and Muslim peace club members from scores of primary and secondary schools. The children attended workshops and lectures on preventing intolerance and violence.

Something similar happened in Europe, where GNRC Europe and Religions for Peace Europe collaborated with UNICEF to celebrate The World Day of Prayer. The three groups gathered together religious leaders of all faiths from around the European Union. The leaders joined children and youth in Brussels, where they attended a conference on 19 November 2012.

In Brazil, the Pastoral da Criança and the GNRC organized one of the largest World Day celebrations in the world. Starting on 19 November, they sponsored seven days of activities in five state capitals: Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Florianópolis, Porto Alegre and São Paulo. The events, which promoted a safe and healthy future, allowed children to do scores of activities, including playing sports, learn origami from Buddhists, and learn about the protecting the environment from members of Brazil's Department of the Environment.

The World Day of Prayer was commemorated in New York at a Covenant House location that provides 30-day emergency housing for young mothers and their children. The World Day Secretariat led a workshop based on Arigatou International's *Learning to Live Together* manual for 17 mothers of various nationalities. The workshop exercises aimed to foster a stronger sense of community among the young women and encouraged them to reflect on values central to motherhood and raising their children.

Teen pregnancy – like early marriage – can rob a girl of her future. “That is why,” Archbishop Tutu said, “on this year’s World Day of Prayer and Action, I call on the community of faith to do everything in our power to end child marriage and ensure that girls can fulfill their God-given potential.”

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