

MALAWI DAY OF PRAYER AND ACTION FOR CHILDREN FOR CHILD PROTECTION THEME: “STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN”

Introduction

“Stop Violence against Children” is the global theme for the 2011 Day of Prayers and Action for Child Protection which is held on 20th November every year to celebrate the Convention on the Right of the Child. This date marks the day in which the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Malawi joins the community of nations on this worthy cause, by aligning with the 2011 global theme to “Stop Violence against Children”, through actions in Child Protection.

In Malawi, approximately 48 per cent of Malawian women experience intimate-partner violence, which leaves an estimated 3.1 million children growing up in violent homes, witnessing domestic violence and experiencing its negative effects. Sixty five per cent of girls experience some form of child abuse during their lifetime, compared with 35 per cent of boys. One in three girls aged 15 to 19 years are married and one in four children are involved in child labor. Nearly 13 per cent of children have lost one or both parents, half of them to HIV-related illnesses. Many of Malawi’s 1 million orphaned children live in poor communities that are unable to provide optimal care and protection, leaving the children vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Prolonged exposure to violence leads to disruption of children’s emotional, social and intellectual development. Children exposed to sexual violence risk acquiring HIV and AIDS. Child marriage leads to early pregnancy and removal of girls from school.

Malawi Action

The faith community has a crucial role to play in sensitizing communities and reducing violence, abuse, exploitation and the negligence of children. The faiths can also play a key role in caring for survivors of violence. Therefore, as part of the commemorative events, UNICEF has collaborated with Malawi Interfaith AIDS Associations to mobilize the Faith Community to actively participate in the incorporation of child protection strategies in its programs in order to contribute to efforts aimed at reducing violence against children in Malawi and create a community that cares for survivors of violence, abuse, exploitation and negligence.

The following activities will be undertaken to kick start advocating for child protection within the Faith community of Malawi.

1. Orientation of 40 key Religious Leaders and 10 media personnel on child protection as a concept and the proposed strategies for adoption and implementation.

This activity will seek to indoctrinate Malawi’s key Religious Leaders in Child Protection. This meeting will act to advocate for the adoption of child protection as the responsibility of the church and seek the appreciation of its leadership that protecting children falls within their mandate. The workshop will offer Religious Leaders the opportunity to explore how child

protection can be promoted within the church and strategize how it can effectively be implemented in the next five years.

2. Organization and facilitation of the National Day of Prayer and Action for Children.

This day will be observed on 20th November in collaboration with the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children which is intended to connect people and organizations working to protect children.

Through this initiative a major advocacy campaign on child protection and care among the faith community will be launched. The country's major religious institutions will during this function explore child protection as per the scriptures' appeal and advocate for the positioning of children's issues as priority items for prayer and teaching within the structures of the churches and mosques in the country.

Among other activities the function will include the following:

- Preaching and teaching sessions by various religious institutions on child protection and welfare.
- Choirs, Dramas and poetry – that will reflect on children and the role of religion on the promotion of protection and care.
- Presentations and discussions on child protection
- Prior to the function, a series of preparatory meetings will be conducted and these will involve various faith groups, media organizations and government departments.

3. Organization of review and planning meeting

During this meeting Malawi Interfaith AIDS association will seek ways on how the activity could be sustained. This meeting will attempt to achieve the following:

- Review the national day of prayer events and summarize the critical messages that were given during the function.
- Strategize how this activity can be adopted by religious institutions for continuity.
- Identify gaps and areas that need improvements and strategize for next year's event.
- Develop a Road map for 2012 activities

4. Development of materials

To support the events outlined above, a number of materials have been developed. These include:

1. Prayer Booklet (Christian and Moslem)
2. Handbill for the Day of Prayer
3. Day of Prayer posters
4. Day of Prayer stickers
5. Page markers

Key Messages

The following will be the key messages delivered during the event.

1. Violence against children in all its forms is not allowed. Children must be protected from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Report any form of violence against children to Police Victim Support Units, Community Victim Support Units or any other NGO dealing with issues of children.
2. Sexual abuse of children is a crime. Let us report all involved in this practice to the police.
3. Registering a child's birth is a vital step towards protection from violence, abuse and exploitation. Let us take action to register children in the village registers with all village heads in the country.
4. Children grow better in a family environment. Let us take action to avoid putting children in orphanages. Families in communities should help raising children without parental care.
5. Children must be protected from work that is hazardous. Work should not prevent children from attending school. Let us take action to report cases of child labour to district labour offices, social welfare, community victim support units, the police and NGOs.
6. Children, especially girls, should not be forced into harmful cultural practices through initiating ceremonies. Let us take action to stop harmful cultural practices.
7. Property grabbing is a crime and deprives children of their future. Let us report all those that deny children of their inheritance to police.
8. Marriage of children deprives children of their future and puts their lives at risk. Let communities take action to stop the practice. Report those involved to Police.