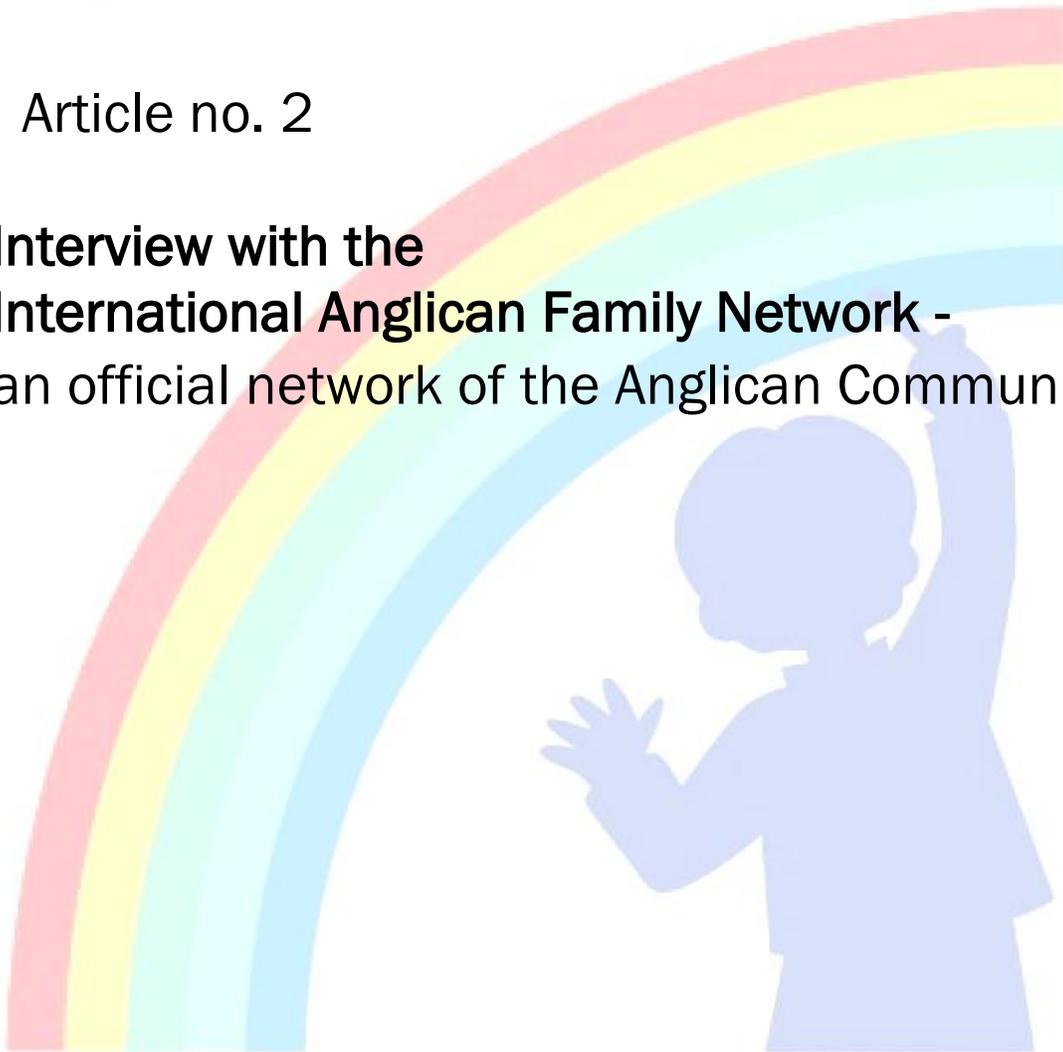


World Day of Prayer and Action for Children: 20 November

# Ideas for Action on Birth Registration

Article no. 2

**Interview with the  
International Anglican Family Network -  
an official network of the Anglican Communion**



Arigatou International New York  
23 October 2013



## Ideas for Action on Birth Registration

The child shall be registered immediately after birth and have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 7. 1)

Birth registration—the official recording of the birth of a child by a government—is a fundamental human right. The African Child Forum calls birth registration “the door to other rights” and says that societies must have it in order to protect children from exploitation and abuse. 2) A birth certificate provides proof of identity and nationality along with access to education and health services and many other rights and benefits. Recognizing the wide-reaching positive impact of birth registration for all children, the churches of the Anglican Communion—comprising some 85 million people in over 165 countries—work actively at various levels to promote it. The International Anglican Family Network (IAFN), one of the Networks of the worldwide Anglican Communion, provides a forum for information exchange on the challenges facing families in different countries and cultures and encourages practical work on behalf of its churches and the wider community.

We hope that this article will both inform and inspire World Day affiliates who may be planning birth registration initiatives for the World Day this November and/or longer term programs. Following the article is a list of action steps for your consideration and a list of contacts.

Dr. Sally Thompson, Network Coordinator of the International Anglican Family Network (IAFN) recently shared details about the activities of the IAFN and the Anglican Communion to promote universal birth registration of children. Read about their work after this brief background.

### Background: global birth registration

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child by a government office. It is a permanent record of the existence of a person before the law and it is customary to issue a birth certificate as proof. If the certificate is subsequently lost or damaged, it is usually possible to obtain another copy from the relevant government office. In some countries, the child is immediately registered by staff in the hospital or birthing center where the child is born, or a parent travels at a later date to a government office to register the birth. In some regions of the world, birth registration is not done at all.



**Diocesan Social worker with Yuliana who for 87 years had no national document of identity. Now, at last, she has one! Photo: Comunion Perú**

Why children are not registered. There are many reasons why some children are not registered at the time of their birth or soon thereafter: 1) these children are almost always from poor, socially excluded or displaced families; 2) their parents usually have low levels of formal education; 3) in some cases, people do not fully understand the importance of having a birth certificate, particularly if they are not registered themselves; 4) they live in countries where registration systems are not in place or not functional; 5) cost and distance to registration centers are the reasons most frequently cited by parents for not registering their children; 6) sometimes parents do not bother to register a daughter; because she is 'only a girl' they believe she does not need to be registered; 7) if newborns are seriously ill or have physical disabilities, sometimes parents do not believe they will survive and they do not register their births; and 8) some people are suspicious about the reasons for registering births and, fearing for the safety of their children, avoid registering them.

The importance of birth registration. Without a birth certificate, people are not only denied an identity but they may be denied access to certain rights and benefits. Children in need of special protections face even greater hardships when their births are not registered. For more details on the importance of birth registration and the many factors that prevent it, see *ABCs for Action and Advocacy: A Note On Universal Birth Registration* by World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. 3)

Non-registration rates. According to UNICEF, 49% of the world's children under 5 years of age were unregistered during the period 2005-2011, while the figure for unregistered births in Least Developed Countries is 65%. 4) Some countries have even higher figures of non-registration of births: Somalia 97%; Ethiopia 93%; Bangladesh 90%; Chad 84%; and United Republic of Tanzania 84%.

More work and more partners needed. With UNICEF reports stating that only half of children under five are registered in the world, UNICEF further advises that political commitment and strategic partnerships are essential in establishing and implementing birth registration legislation, policies and initiatives. 5) Lessons learned during the past decade highlight the crucial role and influence of religious leaders and their capacity to engage in partnerships with others, including government ministries and NGOs, to support birth registration campaigns. Clearly, the 85 million members of the Anglican Communion can play a vital role.

### **Anglican Communion's work on birth registration programs**

*"Churches and other faith groups are well placed within remote and marginalized communities to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration and to collaborate with governments, the UN and other agencies in order to promote innovative community-based responses to registration. This is desperately needed in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 63% of births remain unregistered."*

Dr. Rowan Williams, on World Day 2012  
(At the time of this statement, Dr. Williams was Archbishop of Canterbury)

Anglican Consultative Council Resolution on birth registration. During the international meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in 2012, members adopted a resolution to promote birth registration and support families in overcoming obstacles to registration. This has become an important mandate for the entire Communion. The Anglican Communion is

also aware that accurate birth and other registration statistics are vital to adequate education and welfare provision and targets such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Important step: provide education.

The IAFN believes the first step is to educate and sensitize people about the importance of birth registration. Because the churches of the Anglican Communion minister among those who have no voice and are



**IAFN promotes birth registration**

and explicitly support the welfare of children, and because these churches have a wide range of grass-roots contact in remote rural as well as urban areas, the IAFN knows how the churches can be really helpful in educating parents and communities about the importance of birth registration. Where there is no history of birth registration, there can be suspicion and fears about its purpose. IAFN sees a role for all church leaders and clergy to help with education by using their authority to take the message to their congregations in many ways including: 1) preaching on the topic; 2) using their many educational resources to raise awareness of its importance and allay fears; and 3) in co-operation with civil authorities, linking birth registration with baptism.

Also provide practical help. In addition to education, churches can also provide practical help to parishioners to obtain birth certificates, such as: 1) assisting them with completing application forms, helping them to register, and if possible, giving financial assistance; 2) providing advice and assistance in navigating the difficulties—sometimes the very fact that a church is providing support may open some bureaucratic doors for marginalized and impoverished people; and 3) if city registry offices are too distant, offering church buildings as temporary registration centers.

IAFN promotes birth registration through written materials.



**The late Father Juliao Mutemba (back to camera) helped get birth certificates for many parents and children living on the 17-hectare Hulene rubbish dump near Maputo, Mozambique.**

While its work on birth registration around the world is relatively new, the IAFN has already made much progress and has prepared information materials and shared them with its members globally. With an introduction by Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, the first IAFN newsletter on birth registration, *Count Every Child*, was published in November 2011 and describes the importance of birth registration in ensuring children have access to their rights as citizens and the protection of an identity, as well as the potential of churches to ensure more children are registered. 6) The IAFN published its second newsletter in June 2013, *Birth Registration: Church Responses*, which provides examples of successful actions taken in various countries and

includes the work of the late Fr. Juliao Mutemba who exercised his ministry to people living on Hulene rubbish dump in Maputo, Mozambique. 7) With the help of his church, Fr. Juliao worked to obtain registration documents for them and their children so they could access

education and the chance of a fuller life. This newsletter also refers to the work done with various partners such as the Mothers' Union in several African countries (see more under 'Partnerships' below and in the newsletters.) Both newsletters are available on-line and printed copies were mailed to hundreds of contacts in the Anglican Communion without access to the internet.

Use of social media to share ideas. The IAFN recently expanded onto social media such as Facebook and Twitter and started a Blog; these sites all post information on birth registration, provide examples of work being done and invite responses from readers.

Effectiveness of sharing information. It is evident to the IAFN that information in the newsletters and on social media sites has led to a greater awareness of the importance of birth registration and has encouraged more members of the Anglican Communion to tackle the problem. For example, some of its church leaders such as Oliver Simon, Bishop of a diocese in northern Madagascar and Bishop Andre Soares of Angola are encouraging churches in their areas to look into the number of unregistered children in their communities and achieve progress by means such as linking registration with baptism. In Africa, the churches have a wide range of grass roots contacts and play a key role in both rural and urban areas. Although a certificate of baptism can sometimes be accepted as a means of entry into school, it does not provide the same protections and rights that are provided by a birth certificate.

Example of sharing news online. After reading the online newsletter, Dr. Samson Chicki, the newly-appointed General Secretary of the Anglican Church at the Anglican National Office in Papua New Guinea (PNG) posted a comment on the IAFN Blog to say he had previously worked for many years in the National Civil Registry office on a campaign to increase birth registration, and was planning to work with the civil authorities, the Church and other parties, to build on these links to establish a birth registration project for all Anglicans in PNG.

IAFN future sharing of information. Building on the willingness of the Churches of the Anglican Communion to be involved in registration procedures, the IAFN wishes to encourage more church leaders and congregations to take up the issue. It will continue to gather information about such work and best ways to carry it out, and will share this information as a resource to encourage others.

Partnerships increase success.

IAFN believes that more functional links need to be built between governments, civil authorities, agencies such as UNICEF, NGOs and organizations based in the community, such as the churches. The IAFN reports that considerable success has been achieved to-date by partnerships with churches. For example, the Churches of the Anglican Communion in Uganda, working with the Mothers' Union—an important church organization with branches and a large membership in many communities, rural and urban—and the Health Department, and with support from UNICEF, together achieved registration certificates for over 73,000 children. 8)

Collaboration and training. IAFN states that the interfaith workshop on birth registration for religious leaders, to mark the World Day of Prayer in Nigeria in 2011, showed clearly the potential of Christian leaders as well as Muslim leaders to promote birth registration among their communities. Over 70 men and women from all over the country participated in this workshop, and among them were key Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars. Organized jointly by UNICEF, the National Population Commission and the Federal Ministry of Information, together with the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Christian

Association of Nigeria, the workshop participants produced materials that support birth registration that are based on Muslim religious texts and Christian religious texts. They also identified contexts in which both Christian and Muslim religious leaders could actively promote birth registration including during rites of passage, religious festivals and weekly sermons. 9) 10) In addition, participants produced a joint work plan with the National Population Commission, outlining specific actions to improve birth registration coverage throughout Nigeria. The IAFN is interested in having some members of the Anglican Communion participate in a future inter-faith workshop for religious leaders.

Obstacles that IAFN believes need to be overcome:

- The churches' promotion of birth registration is often hampered by complex procedures and the lack of registration centers. For example in Papua New Guinea, many births do not take place in hospitals or clinics, and travel to a registration center is often impossible;
- Some of the laws and practices involved in registration are discriminatory against mothers and in some areas girls are less likely to be registered at birth;
- It is apparent that there is a lack of understanding of the potential of the churches among some State authorities and NGOs. Although they promote the concept of partnership, there is often no reference to the possibility of church involvement;
- There is also a clear need for some targeted resources and training;
- While the churches can do much of the work as part of their ministry, some resources are needed. For example, payment for certificates is often required even though legally they are free. When legal complications arise, particularly for un-registered adults— for example in Romania—it can be very costly to solve them.

Monitoring progress by the Anglican Communion.

The Resolution passed during the 2012 ACC asked the IAFN to monitor developments in the Anglican churches and to report back to the next ACC meeting in 2016. To do this, the IAFN will work on a mapping exercise to keep track of progress. The IAFN will also work to increase awareness among local and regional church leadership and will look for more case studies showing practical action in support of universal birth registration and share details with others.

Why Birth Registration is a good project for World Day. The IAFN recommends that birth registration is a good project to work on by members of the Anglican Communion and by others for World Day and for the longer term for several reasons: 1) registration at birth is one of the rights set out in the 1989 UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 7.) It gives an identity, a nationality and opens the door to many opportunities; 2) it is also a gender issue—registration processes need to be more easily available to mothers, and girls have as much right as boys to be registered at birth; 3) as well as being in the interest of the individual child and his/her family, it is in the interest of the state and its development, as only with adequate statistics obtained by high rates of registration can targets such as the Millennium Development Goals be measured and developed.



**Ugandan children proudly show off their birth certificates. Photo: PLAN**

## Action steps for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children—celebrated on Universal Children’s Day (20 November) of each year—is a social movement dedicated to ending violence against children. All people of goodwill who care about children are invited to plan and participate in the World Day activities. If you are interested in working with communities and parents to promote universal birth registration, here are some ideas you could consider for this year and for the future:

### 1. Learn About Birth Registration

- Religious Leaders, faith-based and secular organizations are encouraged to learn about the process of birth registration in their respective communities according to their local laws.
- The responsibility for overseeing birth registration should lie with a country’s Civil Register. Civil registration is the system by which a government records the vital events of its citizens and residents. The resulting repository or database is called civil register or registry, or population registry. In some countries, a special division of the civil registry is called the family registry. Usually, the administration and maintenance of the civil registry is managed at a local level, through offices in regional or municipal authorities, and these are the best first point of contact to learn more about the processes of birth registration in their country.

### 2. Inform and Raise Awareness

- Enlist the help of highly-regarded community, religious and traditional leaders to promote birth registration through sermons. Collaborate with them to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of birth registration when children are brought in for baptism, christenings, bris ceremonies, birth ceremonies, naming ceremonies and when other solemn rite of passage rituals are observed.
- Raise awareness and emphasize the importance of birth registration through sermons and educational forums.
- Incorporate messages about birth registration during counseling sessions.
- Raise young people’s awareness about the importance of birth registration through information, education and communication activities and media campaigns. Ensure that children’s voices are included in the development of strategies and plans to achieve birth registration for all children.

For more ideas of what you can do on World Day to support birth registration efforts, please see page 14 and 15 of *ABCs for Action and Advocacy: A Note On Universal Birth Registration* by World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. 11)  
<http://dayofprayerandaction.org/take-action>

## Footnotes

- 1) United Nations, *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990.  
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- 2) Child Protection International.  
<http://childprotectioninternational.org/AboutUs/History/History.html>
- 3) World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. *ABCs for Action and Advocacy: A Note On Universal Birth Registration*. 2012.  
<http://dayofprayerandaction.org/take-action>
- 4) UNICEF, State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities. Statistics: Table 9. Pgs. 132-135. <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/>
- 5) [http://www.childinfo.org/birth\\_registration\\_progress.html](http://www.childinfo.org/birth_registration_progress.html)
- 6) IAFN Newsletter: *Count Every Child*. 2011.  
<http://iafn.anglicancommunion.org/newsletters/2011/november/editorial.cfm>
- 7) IAFN Newsletter: *Birth Registration: Church Responses*. Pg. 11. 2013.  
<http://iafn.anglicancommunion.org/newsletters/2013/june/index.cfm>
- 8) Ibid. Pg. 6-7. <http://iafn.anglicancommunion.org/newsletters/2013/june/index.cfm>
- 9) Creating an Enabling Environment for Birth Registration in Christian Communities - Opportunities and Challenges.  
<http://www.dayofprayerandaction.org/images/events/186/docs/Christian%20Birth%20Registration%20Workshop.pdf>
- 10) Creating an Enabling Environment for Birth Registration in Muslim Communities - Opportunities and Challenges.  
<http://www.dayofprayerandaction.org/images/events/186/docs/CREATING%20AN%20ENABLING%20ENVIRONMENT%20FOR%20BIRTH%20REGISTRATION%20IN%20MUSLIM%20COMMUNITIES.pdf>
- 11) World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. *ABCs for Action and Advocacy: A Note On Universal Birth Registration*. 2012. Pg. 14-15.  
<http://dayofprayerandaction.org/take-action>

## Contacts

1. Anglican Communion  
Website: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm>
2. International Anglican Family Network (IAFN)  
Website: [www.iafn.net](http://www.iafn.net)  
IAFN email: [mail@iafn.net](mailto:mail@iafn.net)  
IAFN Blog: <http://registerbirths.blogspot.co.uk>  
IAFN Facebook: International Anglican Family Network  
IAFN Twitter: @IAFN2
3. World Day of Prayer and Action for Children:  
website: [www.dayofprayerandaction.org](http://www.dayofprayerandaction.org)  
email: [mail@dayofprayerandaction.org](mailto:mail@dayofprayerandaction.org)  
Facebook: World Day of Prayer and Action for Children  
Twitter: @prayerandaction