



Activity Report

World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2019



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Arigatou International — New York
Prayer and Action for Children



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Introduction



Ending violence against children is an urgent moral imperative and global challenge. **Arigatou International** reaffirms through its initiatives the impact that collaborative work among religious communities, faith-based organizations, UN agencies, governments, civil society and secular organizations has in protecting children from all forms of violence. Arigatou International is a non-profit organization that develops and sustains unique multi-stakeholder initiatives designed to ensure that all children are treated with dignity, all children's rights are respected, and all children have the opportunity to freely pursue their full human potential. They are: **Prayer and Action for Children, Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), Ethics Education for Children and End Child Poverty.**

Initiated in 2008 by Arigatou International, the **World Day of Prayer and Action for Children** is celebrated every year on Universal Children's Day and the anniversary of the Convention on the

Rights of the Child – 20 November. It connects religious communities and secular organizations in a common endeavor to protect children's dignity. Through interfaith and advocacy actions inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the opportunity to express hope and determination through prayer, the World Day serves as an interfaith and intercultural platform committed to a world fit for children.

Building upon the Panama Declaration that resulted from the 5th Global Network of Religions for Children Forum on "*Ending Violence Against Children: Faith Communities in Action*," Arigatou International and its partners give high priority to addressing violence against children, particularly through the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children; 5.2 and 5.3 on ending violence against women and girls; and 8.7 on ending economic exploitation of children.

Scope of the World Day 2019

The World Day 2019 was celebrated in **42 countries** in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East,¹ thanks to the support of **41 partners and GNRC members** that undertook **98 actions** and reached

out **31,926 people**. The World Day brought together a total of **14 religious communities**² represented in the **94% of interfaith actions** that took place in 2019.³



**Celebrated in
42 Countries**



**41 Partners and
GNRC Members**



**Undertook
98 Actions**



**Reached out to
31,926 People**



**Brought Together 14
Religious Communities**

¹ See annex I for list of countries and number of participants.

² Animism, Bahai, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian, Druze, Hindu, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Seicho No-Ie, Shembe, and Sikh.

³ See annex I for details of religious communities represented per country.

Issues Addressed Through the World Day Actions



The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2019 mobilized faith communities, faith-based organizations, religious leaders and civil society around the prevention of violence against children, but especially around the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Marches, prayers, forums and workshops called for governments, civil society and religious leaders' actions to protect children and to listen to their views. The GNRC members and other implementing partners marked the World Day advocating for the key role that faith communities play in building an inclusive, safe and peaceful world for children. In Nicaragua, for example, the World Day was marked by the importance of prayer as an essential part of spirituality and peace, and by giving a recreational and creative space for children to share their reflections and feelings about the topics. Other actions in Democratic Republic of Congo

(DRC), Lebanon and South Africa addressed the importance of violence prevention (including kidnapping of children and child marriage), and the role of prayer and spirituality in protecting children.

A number of the World Day celebrations in 2019 addressed the CRC anniversary and highlighted key issues affecting children's rights including child sexual abuse and exploitation; child dignity online; school violence; child corporal and humiliating punishment; children on the move; and climate change.⁴

- **CRC anniversary:** Most of the implementing countries focused their World Day actions on the CRC anniversary. Twenty-three countries took the opportunity to celebrate and assess the national progress since the adoption and ratification of the Convention. In Chile, the GNRC looked at the role of faith communities

4 See annex I for topics/issues addressed by the World Day in each implementing country.

since the adoption of the treaty and the importance to ensure every child's right to be heard in decisions that concern them. The celebration engaged Christian, Muslim and Sikh participants. In Montenegro, Christian and Muslim communities focused on the rights of children with disabilities and those affected by violence.

The CRC anniversary also brought attention to key structural issues that make the realization of children's rights challenging. In Kenya, for example, the GNRC undertook actions and prayers involving Christian and Muslim communities to raise awareness about the situation of gang violence present in the Mathare slum. The injustice, inequality, and poverty affecting the community makes Mathare and many other places in the world a highly vulnerable context for children to enjoy their rights. In Burundi, these factors become a bigger risk during the electoral process where the violence and radicalization that arises prior to and after elections often targets children. For this reason, the World Day actions in Burundi advocated for the prevention of violent extremism including political and religious intolerance.



The GNRC members in Colombia partnered with UNICEF to commemorate the anniversary of the Convention through interfaith prayer and workshops on children's rights. In Cuba, the celebration engaged children and adults in dialogue on the rights of children and ways to empower them as advocates and agents of change. Some countries including Peru, joined celebrations on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention that were co-organized by local governments and civil society organizations. In Brazil, the organizers prioritized children's right to play and encouraged through prayer and social interaction based on games and play, ludic participation opportunities for children and the importance of a caring and safe environment for child-upbringing.



World Day celebrations in Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, Ecuador, El Salvador, Pakistan, Panama, and Rwanda incorporated *Faith and Children's Rights*, the multi-religious Study that Arigatou International launched on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the CRC. Through forums, workshops and presentations at universities, Bahai, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim children and adults participating in these celebrations reflected on the role of faith communities in advancing the child rights agenda in their contexts. In Panama, children played a key role in the presentation

of the Study. In Argentina, a GNRC youth from Ecuador participated at the event to share her insights on the contribution of the Study.

- **Sexual abuse and exploitation of children:** Most of the seven countries that prioritized actions to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation are African countries, where the GNRC members engage in extraordinary advocacy efforts to protect children from violence. In Cameroon, 11 interfaith prayers and awareness raising workshops were undertaken for teachers, parents, caregivers and children on how to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation and the role of religion in protecting children. In Ghana, the World Day brought together stakeholders including Christian and Muslim religious leaders, as well as traditional authorities, community members, students, teachers, government officials, officers from the Ghana Education Service and Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service to reflect on the causes, effects, and prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation. As a result, a committee was formed to continue the local dialogue and actions to address the issue.

In Tanzania, the World Day involved parents, teachers, religious leaders, and children to address together the situation of children in the country, including the rates of sexual abuse and exploitation. At the end of the celebration, the participants signed a pledge of 13 points that call for actions to increase the protection of children. The actions include higher commitment of religious communities to advocate for children's rights and to collaborate with governments in the prevention of violence against children; parents' commitment to protect children from the responsibility to generate family income; children's commitment to protect each other and avoid stigmatization and bullying; and, community commitment to

respect and value every child. In Uganda, the World Day involved poetry and drama to raise awareness about violence against children and way to prevent child abuse. Their celebration was marked by creativity and interfaith prayer. In Sierra Leone, the World Day addressed this issue analyzing the reality of their context that presents Sierra Leone as a source, transit and destination country for child trafficking with the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Trafficking within the country is more prevalent than transitional trafficking, and the majority of victims are children. Discussions on the role of spirituality and interfaith prayers were central in this commemoration.



Bhutan is a south-Asian country where the GNRC members have put significant attention on the prevention of violence against children, including child abuse and exploitation. The World Day 2019 addressed this topic through workshops with students to reflect on the root causes and effects in children's development. As a result, children had the opportunity to build a personal safety network to protect themselves and others. Other actions in Bhutan included community mapping to identify the risks that children face and to explore peacebuilding opportunities. Buddhist, Christian and Hindu children participated in actions and the interfaith prayer to commemorate the World Day.

In India the World Day was marked through 14 actions focused on violence prevention as a broad theme and child sexual abuse and exploitation as one of the main advocacy issues. Shanti Ashram, the GNRC member in India led storytelling, intergenerational dialogue, and workshops that mobilized Christian, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Sikh children, parents, and community members around the importance of creating safe and peaceful environment for children; listening to their views; and learning about violence against children in India and how to prevent it.

- **Child dignity in the digital world:** For three consecutive years, the World Day in Nepal and Sri Lanka has served as the advocacy platform to run year-round awareness raising campaign on child dignity online. In Sri Lanka, the program that started as a celebration for the World Day in 2017 has reached nearly 2,000 children in Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara and Hatton districts. The program targets children, faith and community leaders and aims to raise awareness about child online sexual exploitation, especially on the risks of social media and the internet including its effect in mental health and social skills. The program also focuses on the ethical use of internet, and the responsibility that users have when interacting with others.



Peer-to-peer learning is the method that the GNRC member in Nepal prioritized to run their year-round program on child dignity online that also started as part of their World Day action. Ten child advocates were trained during the World Day celebration in 2017 who reached almost 18 schools and were able to engage almost 5,000 students through awareness raising workshops between 2018-2019. Given the outstanding outputs of the initiative, the World Day 2019 in Nepal gave the opportunity to eight new child advocates to be trained to carry on the child dignity online program between 2019-2020. As an achievement of this year-round implementation, the new child advocates will be trained by the former activists that started the online safety campaigns. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim children and adults benefited from these programs in both Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Our sessions are based on knowledge dissemination. We teach children and they teach their peers and friends in the villages or classes. They alert them on the risks of chatting with known and unknown people and online sexual exploitation. (GNRC Sri Lanka)

The GNRC-Dominican Republic also addressed child dignity online by bringing together local representatives from the Bahai, Bhrama Kumaris, Christian, Hare Krishna, Hindu, and Jewish communities to pray together and exchange views about practices to protect children online, as well as ideas for collaboration on this issue.

- **School violence:** Every child's right to education is as important as their right to be protected from violence. This is why the GNRC members in Romania and India have prioritized World Day celebrations that encourage violent-free schools and communities. In Romania, 25 workshops for children and youth on child

rights, violence and alternatives to prevent it marked the World Day through experiential learning (role play) and dialogue. The workshops engaged both Christian and Muslim children in reflections to deepen their understanding of their rights and the way they can promote and respect them. By addressing the bullying cases in their schools, children also reflected on the importance of respecting human dignity and on their role in protecting their life and others. In India, one of the World Day actions engaged adolescents from various schools in dialogue on violence against children; their role in creating peaceful and safe environment in and outside the school; and alternatives to end gender violence and child-marriage. Interfaith prayer was also part of these celebrations.

- **Corporal and humiliating punishment:** The GNRC-Mexico focused their efforts on awareness raising about the harmful effects of physical and humiliating punishment of children by inviting children to express their experiences and opinions on the subject; reflecting on the actions implemented by the GNRC-Mexico on the prevention and elimination of violence against children in all settings; and encouraging interfaith collaboration. The celebration also included an interfaith prayer joined by Buddhist, Christian, and Brahma Kumaris communities.

In Bhutan, one of the GNRC members undertook workshops to raise awareness and build commitments on the promotion of healthy relationships and prevention of physical violence in school. The children showed enthusiasm and interest in acquiring skills to become young advocates and to mobilize others for the elimination of physical violence in the form of intimidation and mistreatment of peers. Participants had the opportunity to share their own experiences of physical violence in which they were directly or indirectly involved.



In Romania, four workshops on positive parenting were conducted to allow parents and caregivers the opportunity to discuss effective methods to connect emotionally with children and to raise them with empathy and respect, thus avoiding violence and any form of corporal and humiliating punishment. The participants reflected on the consequences of violence against children, within the family and school environment; the importance of listening to children; and on encouraging them to share their views on issues affecting them.

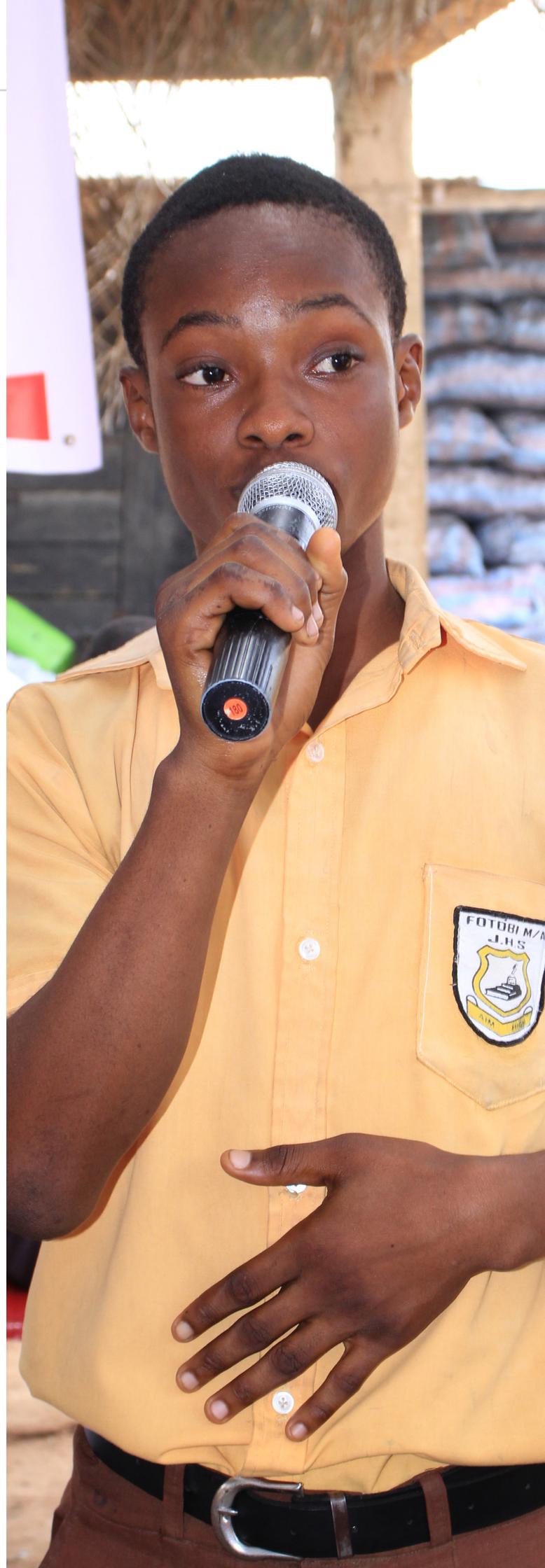
- **Children on the move:** The situation of migrant, refugee and displaced children remain a concern for child rights advocates and faith communities. In Serbia, the GNRC member partnered with the IOM to mark the World Day with an art contest and role play performances that aimed to raise awareness around migrant children and



the need to build inclusive societies that do not discriminate migrants but rather value their diversity and their contribution to the economic and social development of the destination countries. Christian and Muslim children actively participated in the art contest and workshops and shared their views and commitments towards migrants living in Sambor city.

The World Day in Malaysia prioritized the situation of Rohingya refugee children and the GNRC members carried out a roundtable discussion to encourage dialogue between Christian and Muslim religious communities on how religious values serve humanity at large and how they can mobilize decision-makers, communities and resources to respond to children's needs while protecting them from every form of exploitation.

- **Climate change:** The last few years have been key for the mobilization around the issue of climate crisis particularly including children and adolescents. This is the case of one of the GNRC members from the Philippines that focuses its work on emergency response and established a seed bank as part of their World Day action. The seed bank aims to develop climate resilience, as well as to strengthen food security programs by creating gardens for displaced children going to school or hosted by it. Animists, Christian, and Muslim children and adults benefited from the World Day actions in Mindanao. In Senegal, the World Day allowed children to reflect on the climate crisis and their role in creating adaptive solutions to climate change. The action engaged Christian and Muslim children through training in watering techniques of young plants, use of gardening equipment and irrigation system.



Partnerships



Over the years, the implementation of the World Day has engaged several stakeholders. The GNRC members have successfully involved religious leaders, religious Councils, and other religious platforms in the World Day celebration. In this edition, implementing countries also aimed to engage governments, UN agencies, and civil society organizations. Some of these collaborations included:

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** World Vision; Police; and primary and secondary schools in Visoko.
- **Bhutan:** UNESCO; International Youth Society (IYS); National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC); Youth Society for Community Service (YSWCS); Ministry of Education; and schools.
- **Burundi:** Scouts Burundi; REJADH; Village of hope; Club Dukingire Agateka k'Abana (Club for Children right protection).
- **Colombia:** UNICEF; Ministry of Interior.
- **Dominican Republic:** UNICEF, Plan International, Coalition for Children.
- **DRC:** MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC), REJADH; Réseau Communautaire de Protection des Enfants 'RECOPE.'
- **Ghana:** Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (Ghana Police Service); Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice; Ghana Education Service; National Commission on Civic Education.

- **India:** District Child Protection Committee, Coimbatore; Focolare Movement; Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed university; Indian Academy of Paediatrics; Integrated Child Development Services, Coimbatore; among others.
- **Kenya:** Retirement Benefit Authority (RBA); KCA University; The HORN Institute; Cry of the Young One Organization; Drive-In Primary School; Child Life Kenya; Hidayat Timeless.
- **Malaysia:** UNDP; Arkan Institute; Darul Eslah Academy, Cinta Syria Malaysia; among others.
- **Mexico:** Center for Child Protection, Mexican Human Rights Commission.
- **Montenegro:** Zinac; Integritet.
- **Panama:** National Secretariat for Children and Family, Markova Concepción, Minister for Social Development; Sara Rodríguez, Director of the National Secretariat for Children and Family; Carlos Nuñez, Interim Director of the United Nations in Panamá; Kim Kyungsun, UNICEF Panama representative; and representatives of the Ministry of Health.
- **Romania:** CJRAE Bistrita Nasaud (Center of Educational Resources and Assistance); schools.
- **Rwanda:** Umbrella for Vulnerable
- **Senegal:** Dream Catchers
- **Serbia:** IOM; Hungarian Civic House; Sombor Youth Boom.
- **Tanzania:** UNIC (United Nations Information Center) Dar es Salaam; Under The Same Sun.
- **The Philippines:** Municipal Government of Makilala, North Cotabato; Barangay (Village) Local Government Unit.



Achievements in 2019

1

Increased **number of countries** where GNRC members and partners celebrated the World Day in comparison to the previous year (**33 to 42**) and the past five years;

4

Increased number of GNRC members and partners commemorating the World Day (**35 to 41**).

2

Active engagement of implementing countries to undertake interfaith actions (**94%** of countries with information available had interfaith celebrations);

5

Seven countries incorporated the study *Faith and Children's Rights* in their World Day celebrations. Four of them had a separate event to present the Study, and many more are interested in its local launching and dissemination.

3

Number of people reached through the World Day 2019 (**31,926**) one third greater than the results from the previous year (22,910).

6

Most of the countries had a **growth tendency** in terms of the scope of their World Day celebrations (including the number of actions and/or the number of people involved). Except for two countries, all the countries engaged in the previous year continued to celebrate in 2019.



7

Strengthened collaboration with World Vision was reflected through their internal World Day celebrations at their offices in France, Switzerland, Mozambique, Thailand, and United Kingdom. In addition, the Arigatou New York office which leads the World Day was given the opportunity to join one of the staff webinars to promote the World Day; and questions on the World Day's implementation were included in World Vision's internal advocacy survey. A total of **11 World Vision offices** were involved in the World Day 2019 either through the GNRC or internal celebrations.

8

Increased **synergy with other AI initiatives** including the GNRC and the Ethics Education initiative facilitated the allocation of the World Day's seed money and allowed the participation of one GNRC youth leader from Ecuador to the World Day celebration in Argentina.

9

Several implementing GNRC members and partners showed commitment to **meaningful participation of children**. In addition, support was given for the preparation of children participating at the launch of the *Study Faith and Children's Rights* in Geneva, Buenos Aires, and Panama City.

10

Regular communication with implementing GNRC members and partners (which began in June) prior, during and after the World Day actions delivered higher quality of seed money applications, increased overall scope of their World Day actions, increased interfaith collaboration, and improved documentation and responsiveness to queries and communication.



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All for Children



Annex I: World Day Topic Prioritized by Country

Country	World Day Topic/Issue
Argentina	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
Brazil	CRC anniversary
Bhutan	Child sexual abuse and exploitation and school violence
Bosnia and Herzegovina	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
Burundi	Violent extremism
Cameroon	Child sexual abuse and exploitation
Chile	CRC anniversary
Colombia	CRC anniversary
Comoros	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
Cuba	CRC anniversary
Dominican Republic	Child dignity in the digital world
Democratic Republic of Congo	Child kidnapping and child marriage
Ecuador	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
El Salvador	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
France	CRC anniversary
Ghana	Child sexual abuse and exploitation
India	CRC anniversary, child sexual abuse and exploitation, school and community violence
Kenya	Gang violence
Lebanon	Violence prevention
Malaysia	Children on the move
Mexico	CRC anniversary, corporal and humiliating punishment of children

Montenegro	CRC anniversary
Mozambique	CRC anniversary
Nepal ⁵	Child dignity in the digital world
Nicaragua	Prayer and its contribution to peace
Pakistan	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study), and child sexual abuse and exploitation
Panama	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
Peru	CRC anniversary
Philippines	Natural disaster and climate change
Romania	School violence and positive parenting
Rwanda	CRC anniversary (including CRC Study)
Senegal	CRC anniversary, natural disaster and climate change
Serbia	Violence prevention and child rights, and children on the move
Sierra Leone	Child trafficking
South Africa	Violence prevention and child rights
Sri Lanka ⁶	Child dignity in the digital world
Switzerland	CRC anniversary
Tanzania	Child sexual abuse and exploitation, and child marriage
Thailand	CRC anniversary
Uganda	Child abuse and exploitation
United Kingdom	CRC anniversary
Uruguay	CRC anniversary

Pending countries:⁷

Uruguay

⁵ The year-round DPAC project in Nepal aims to reach 2000 children in the upcoming months through the 10 youth that were trained.

⁶ DPAC in Sri Lanka is also celebrated as a year-round project.

⁷ Up to week of 31 January 2020.



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“Our prayer and action for children is motivated by both the joy of gratitude, with its vision of all that life could be for children, and the heart-rending compassion we experience when we see children suffering.”

—Rev. Keishi Miyamoto. President, Arigatou International, and Spiritual Director, Myochikai.

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