



Prayer and Action for Children
RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP

2015
2016





PRAYER AND ACTION FOR CHILDREN: RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP

Our Vision

A World Day of Prayer and Action for Children seeks to bring together all people of faith and goodwill to safeguard the integrity, rights and dignity of children, and to promote their survival, development, protection and well-being.

Our Mission

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is a movement involving people of religion and goodwill who are committed to working together to build a world fit for children and who will shape the future of humanity. Guided by our religious teachings and values, inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, committed to helping achieve internationally agreed goals for children, we commit ourselves to protecting the rights of our children to live in safety and security. In our prayer, meditation, worship and action, we express our hope and determination that the world can indeed be made fit for children. While prayer and action for children are certainly needed every day, we will celebrate Universal Children's Day on the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child each year on the 20th of November with prayers and common actions in support of projects that enhance the lives of children and young people.

GIVING

ALL FOR CHILDREN


FOUNDATION OF ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL

Arigatou International is a non-profit, faith-based organization, which works to bring people from all walks of life together to build a better world for children. Arigatou International is “All for Children,” and draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to come together to address children’s issues.

Arigatou International 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. Involving diverse partners, these initiatives emphasize both grassroots action and international advocacy. Arigatou International has great faith in children, who actively help shape its work. Young people are respected, active partners in every Arigatou International initiative.

In the year 2000, Arigatou International inaugurated the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), which continues to grow today as a platform for interfaith cooperation on children’s issues. In 2004, it began promoting Ethics Education for Children, and later published, with UNICEF and UNESCO, Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education. In 2008, it launched a global movement of Prayer and Action for Children, and in 2012, the Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty. From religious leaders, to international organizations, to grassroots child rights workers, people on every continent have enthusiastically welcomed these initiatives, and they continue to grow rapidly in reach, diversity, and impact.

Arigatou International was founded in 1990 by the Japanese Buddhist organization Myochikai, whose members continue to support its work today with donations. The name “Arigatou” means “thank you” in Japanese, and it expresses the spirit of the Myochikai members, supporting children around the world through their giving.



All people of faith who believe in a better future for humanity teach the power of love, peace and compassion, and the shared duty of care and respect for children. Prayer and Action for Children is founded on the conviction that religious communities of all beliefs have a duty towards children, to protect their lives and, by doing so, ensure a world fit for children, and for posterity.



ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL AND ITS FOUR INITIATIVES

Prayer and Action for Children

It is a core belief of religions and spiritual traditions worldwide that prayer can bring about change, and that prayer in community with others can bring about meaningful action. Based on that shared understanding, people from religious communities and secular organizations working for children’s rights gathered in Hiroshima in 2008, at the occasion of the Third GNRC Forum, to join Reverend Takeyasu Miyamoto for the founding of the Prayer and Action for Children (PAC) initiative.

Since its launch in 2008, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children has organized the annual World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, held on the 20th of November to commemorate the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The purpose of the annual World Day of Prayer, celebrated in over 90 countries, is to focus worldwide attention on the critical role that religious leaders and faith communities play in promoting action for the well-being of all children, with particular focus on ending violence against children. Moreover, while the Prayer and Action for Children initiative maintains its focus on the significance of the World Day, it also works year-round to raise awareness and to mobilize faith-based organizations and religious leaders to pray for the world’s children and undertake concrete action to protect the youngest members of the world community.

Arigatou International works with members of diverse religious and cultural organizations for the promotion and protection of children’s rights in a world where children and young people face enormous challenges to their safety, health and well-being. With headquarters in Tokyo and offices in Geneva, Nairobi and New York City, Arigatou International also spearheads the following three initiatives: Global Network of Religions for Children; Ethics Education for Children; and End Child Poverty.



Global Network of Religions for Children

The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), founded in 2000, is the leading global-scale interfaith network of organizations and individuals dedicated to securing the rights and well-being of children. Members of the Global Network in over 45 countries, who come from all of the world’s major religions and many other spiritual traditions, work to mobilize the potential of all religions as a positive transforming force for the building of a peaceful world where every human being takes full responsibility for children’s dignity, safety, well-being and joy. The Global Network works with children and young people, addressing how they are portrayed in religious scriptures, how they are cared for, ministered to and treated in religious communities, and how young people view themselves within their religious context.



Ethics Education for Children

The Ethics Education for Children program was launched at the Second GNRC Forum in Geneva in 2004. Within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its commitment to children’s right to education, the intercultural and interfaith program is aimed at providing children and young people with the tools to help them make ethical choices; enhance their spiritual growth; and nurture their sense of belonging to a community. In coordination with UNESCO, UNICEF and the Interfaith Council of Ethics Education for Children, Arigatou International developed *Learning to Live Together*, a toolkit for educators and youth leaders around the world that employs new interfaith and intercultural learning processes to empower children and young people to develop a resilient sense of ethics.



End Child Poverty

Poverty has its root causes in the unequal distribution of resources, war and violence, corruption and poor governance – and children are its worst victims. Poverty is a form of violence, and children living in poverty are at risk of violence from all sides. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015, calling for an end to poverty by 2030, the End Child Poverty initiative is a multi-faith, child-centered, global initiative that mobilizes faith-based resources across religious traditions, through interfaith advocacy and grassroots organizations, in partnership with civil society, United Nations agencies, educators, Governments, development banks, businesses and the media to promote actions to eradicate poverty affecting children. This initiative was introduced at the GNRC Fourth Forum in Dar es Salaam in 2012.



Message from Reverend Keishi Miyamoto

President, Arigatou International

The celebrations of Prayer and Action for Children on November 20th each year provide a precious opportunity to people around the world to pray for children. They give their hearts to children in need around the world through prayer. This feeling of caring about children is shared globally on that day and translates into action for children taken by people from all walks of life. Nothing is more powerful than such universal prayer and action in creating a better world for children. It is my dream that the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children will become a universal day celebrated by the entire international community, far transcending being an initiative of Arigatou International.

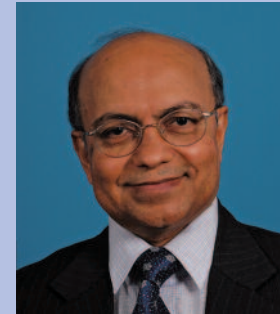
For religious people, “prayer” and “action” are not separable. Action should come from prayer and prayer should conclude with action. When we are at our best, every action is a prayer, and every prayer is an action. This may be a good way to sum up what we mean when we say “faith-based” approaches to problem solving. At the same time, both religious and secular people can work together for children through Prayer and Action for Children. It provides an interface between religious communities and the secular world and thus has a great potential to develop into a global movement in a real sense.

The Prayer and Action for Children initiative is rooted in the speech given by the late Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, then-President of Arigatou Foundation and Leader of Myochikai, to the UN Special Session of General Assembly on Children in 2002. Speaking on behalf of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), he made three proposals for how significant contributions could be made by religious communities working together to build a better world for children. One of these was to promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At Arigatou International, we consider Prayer and Action for Children to be a key global initiative intended to promote child rights as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we have been supporting it in order to make the proposal offered by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto a reality. In fact, Prayer and Action is the basic commitment that Arigatou International has made to all children.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko and other members of the Prayer and Action for Children Council who have made this ambitious initiative happen and actively supported it since the beginning in 2008. I hope that you find this report engaging and useful, and that we can count on your continuing solidarity as we seek to build a better world for children.

VOICES

IN UNISON



Message from Kul Chandra Gautam

Convening Chair, Prayer and Action for Children Council

Love and compassion have guided the best of individual human behavior and values throughout human history. But suspicion, indifference, animosity and hatred also characterize human relations – also among people of different tribes, religions and cultures.

While religious communities may disagree on issues of politics and theology, they can come together for the cause of children, because at its core every religion wants the best for its children. There are misinterpreted teachings from religious texts, which are used to exploit children by keeping them from schools, marrying them young, etc. But it takes a diamond to cut another diamond. So for every one of these misinterpretations, progressive religious leaders can show the positive, enlightened path that highlights the well-being of children.



Message from Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko

Co-Chair, Prayer and Action for Children Council

In the mid-1990s, we received a visitor from Japan at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Reverend Keishi Miyamoto, bringing a vision of interfaith collaboration to the world body of Protestant and Orthodox churches. Those of us listening to Reverend Miyamoto understood that this vision was deeply rooted in the teachings and spirituality of the Lotus Sutra: that all vehicles are one vehicle, that all beings may become Buddhas, and that faith and devotion matter.

The child is the focus of the work of Arigatou and its interreligious programs. Since our first meeting in the mid-1990s, I have been privileged to accompany Arigatou International in its interfaith pilgrimage, to seek and define programs where people of all faiths, of no particular faith, of good will, together, could serve the well-being of children.



Message from Rebeca Rios-Kohn

Director, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children

In the biennium 2015-2016, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children worked together with secular organizations and faith-based communities to draw attention to – and to eliminate – violence against children.

Religion is a source of values that influence our thinking and action. In the drive to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, leaders of faith-based organizations press for the adoption of government policies and legislation to protect children, and continue their core work as community-based service providers, advocates and social mobilizers with moral authority. More than 80 percent of the world's people have a religious affiliation, whether active or passive, and it is vital that we recognize the role that religious leaders and faith-based organizations play as drivers of development efforts at the grassroots level, where communities are built. Raising the status of the child is a key strategy towards ending all forms of violence against children. Religious communities are well placed to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child – its principles are based on moral or ethical values.

As advocates for children's rights, religious communities can help raise the status of the child and influence the formulation of the social policies and laws needed to prevent all forms of violence against children including corporal punishment and sexual exploitation. Religious leaders have vast networks at local, national and global levels, which provide opportunities for raising awareness, and in light of their moral authority, they can become persuasive agents for change.

Advocates for children's rights have noted that by "emphasizing the teachings of the faith which promote non-violence and respect for children," religious leaders as spiritual advisers are in a unique position to address the root causes of violence and take preventive action, as well as help change attitudes and challenge harmful traditional practices. The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is an opportunity for faith communities of diverse religions all over the world to pray for all children and for their prayers to be heard.



Message from Marta Santos Pais

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council

Ending violence against children is a legal and ethical imperative. The voice and engagement of religious and spiritual leaders, and their alliance and collaboration with other stakeholders, is essential if we are to eliminate violence against children. World leaders, in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations in 2015, envisaged a world free from fear and from violence and clearly set out, in Goal 16.2, their commitment to:

"End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children".

In its efforts to tackle this global challenge, the United Nations counts on the close support of its partners in the faith-based community, whose work with children and families at the grassroots level is essential to the success of the ambitious goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.



Message from Dr. Susan Bissell

Director, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council

From the smallest village to the largest city, religious communities, with almost five billion people of faith worldwide, create and sustain large networks for the care and protection of children: their capacity for action is substantial. The biggest challenge to our communities, both secular and religious, and to the safety of children worldwide is the widely accepted feeling that "this is just the way it is". In the global struggle to end violence, complacency is always the enemy of action. We must recognize that reported declines in violence are inequitably distributed, that children are not equally safe everywhere, and that the goal of the international community must be to ensure a safe environment for all young people wherever they may live. Children deserve no less.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP
IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

In August 2006, subsequent to the publication of the groundbreaking United Nations study, *World Report on Violence against Children*, representatives of religious communities, including the leaders of Arigatou International, gathered in Kyoto, Japan, for the Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace.

Leaders of the religious communities assembled in Kyoto were keenly aware that the United Nations study had highlighted that children worldwide rely not only on the international community, but also the world religious community, to ensure their rights and their protection under law.

Acknowledging that they had not fully upheld their obligations to protect children from violence, and that they had “at times tolerated, perpetuated and ignored the reality of violence against children”, religious leaders at the World Assembly agreed, for the first time, to tackle this subject head on. Through the adoption of the Kyoto Declaration on Violence against Children, they resolved to become “part of the solution to eradicating violence against children” and to take leadership within their religious communities and in the broader society.

The Kyoto Declaration supported the mobilization of the entire international community, through the United Nations *World Report*, around the following goals to:

- **Work in partnership** with Governments, United Nations agencies and other civil society actors to create greater awareness of the impact of violence on children;
- **Promote** the rights and dignity of the child;
- **Teach and train** children to understand their responsibilities, including the training of parents, teachers and religious leaders, ensuring that children are protected from violent actions;
- **Develop tools** for theological training and parental education to raise awareness about children’s rights;
- **Work** through interreligious cooperation to address violence
- and to promote methodologies and practices to prevent violence against children;
- **Call upon** Governments to adopt legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, and to ensure the full rights of children, making use of religious communities to serve as monitors of implementation;
- **Establish** special days to bring public and media attention to child rights issues;
- **Call on** UNICEF and the World Conference on Religions for Peace to facilitate the sharing of information and the development of resources to assist religious communities to more effectively address violence against children.

ROLE OF ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL –
PRAYER AND ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Today, in carrying forward the spirit of the Kyoto Declaration, and the commitments made therein, Arigatou International, through Prayer and Action for Children, and in all of its initiatives, works as a forum for advocacy and action. Deriving from the widely shared values on the part of religious communities, Arigatou International and its partners promote the rights of children and the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through programs such as: educating families about the dangers of child marriage; encouraging models of positive parenting; and raising awareness of the importance of birth registration to the safety and security of children.

Child marriage

Arigatou International works to advance awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, regarded as the “International Bill of Rights” for women. Both of these instruments, adopted by the majority of countries in the world, provide well-defined protections for children under 18 years of age.

The betrothal and marriage of a child, that is a person under 18 years of age, should have no legal effect and that all necessary action, including legislative action, should be taken by States to specify a minimum age for marriage, and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Positive parenting

Parents provide the most essential protections for children, within the home and by extension in society, and parental influence over these young

lives determines their future to an incalculable extent. Parents can help them most by adopting an affirmative attitude to the child’s development and learning. Arigatou International actively works to eliminate the persistent practice of corporal punishment and any form of violence against children, especially within the family.

Birth registration

The registration of a child at birth provides basic protection for the individual and establishes the existence of the child under law; it is the foundation for safeguarding many of the child’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Without such registration, children, especially children in refugee situations, face challenges to family tracing and reunification, accessing essential services, including health care, education and social assistance and establishing citizenship. Arigatou International promotes this understanding and is a strong advocate of universal birth registration.



“Religious leaders must recognize the sexual exploitation of children as a pervasive form of violence in contemporary society and need to become active (in addressing this issue).”

Professor Anantanand Rambachan
Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council
Professor and Chair, Religion Department, Saint Olaf College, USA

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER AND ACTION FOR CHILDREN: 2015-2016

Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children and its partners collaborate each year on activities and events to commemorate the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. At its inception in 2008, 20 November was chosen to coincide with Universal Children’s Day, established by the United Nations in 1954, with the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly in 1959 and the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by the General Assembly in 1989. To date, over 550 events have been celebrated in 97 countries around the world.

The World Day Prayer and Action is made possible thanks to the engagement of innumerable volunteers, and its friends and partners at the grassroots level and within religious and secular communities worldwide. The purpose of the World Day is to create a space for diverse religious communities to work together for all children.

Using a whole-community approach, the World Day of Prayer and Action involves children, families, teachers, nurses and doctors, government leaders and civil society activists, religious and community elders and people from all walks of life. The World Day builds momentum for year-round advocacy and actions to raise awareness of the rights of children, and elevate the status of children, as well as to learn, from children themselves, what needs to be done on their behalf.

Over the past two years, activities organized for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children have revealed general trends, focusing, inter alia, on educational activities on violence against children, child marriage, child-rights awareness, partnership-building and networking on the situation of refugee children.

2015
2016

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER AND ACTION
FOR CHILDREN 2016

On 20 November 2016, Pope Francis appealed “to the conscience of all, institutions and families, that children always be protected and their well-being safeguarded ... guaranteeing to every boy and girl that right to schooling and education, so that they may grow in serenity and look with trust to the future”.

In 2016, the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children was marked by activities and events in all five regions of the world, as highlighted below.

In Argentina,* children, parents, teachers, government officials and the elderly joined in a commemoration of the World Day of Prayer and Action by painting public walls, and through the sponsorship of a discussion about violence against children, and the importance of love and peace.

In Belgium, members of Religions for Peace Youth joined up with the team of Soutien Belge Overseas in organizing a one-day event for refugee children on the theme “Friendship”. The members of Soutien Belge promote year-round activities for children focusing on the values of “Living Together”.

In Bulgaria, the National Council of Religious Communities organized a painting contest entitled “Faith—a Dream for a Better World—painting by Children of Different Religions”.

Special efforts were made to involve refugee children. Prayers for children were offered in Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Churches, in Synagogues and Mosques.

In Colombia,* a group of young people who participate in the implementation of Learning to Live Together approach organized a program, including a special prayer service, readings from the Bible, singing, dancing and a football match. Children marched carrying signs with positive messages about children’s rights and the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Interreligious Council of the Congo, with UNICEF support, organized a multi-faith prayer and panel discussion in Kinshasa. The discussion involved members of media outlets and civil society organizations in dialogue with representatives of local Catholic and Protestant Churches and the Islamic and the Baha’i communities.



In India, the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University organized a series of activities in West Bengal to commemorate the Week of Holistic Welfare of Children, including workshops for health and hygiene for children, positive parenting and sport activities for children with disabilities. As part of the India Cares initiative, the Shanti Ashram* organization held conversations with children, leaders and members of faith-based communities in 10 cities and towns, reflecting on the burden of violence affecting children. Interfaith prayers were led by children and a storytelling event was organized for children between the ages of 9 and 15 on the theme “A violence-free childhood: every child’s wish”.

In Lebanon,* on 19 November 2016, the Annas Linnas Association, in cooperation with the non-governmental organizations Himaya and INTERSOS, brought together over 100 people, including school administrators and government leaders, for a conference on violence against children.

In Malaysia,* “I Can Malaysia” organized a trip to the Planetarium in Kuala Lumpur for children from the Rohingya refugee community. The children from this community have no access to schooling in Malaysia, and the trip was aimed at lifting their spirits and expanding their knowledge through interaction with educators in a new environment.

In Panama,* on 4 December 2016, diverse religious leaders under the leadership of the Archbishop of Panama, Jose Domingo Ulloa, children and youth were united in prayer at the Basilica Don Bosco to eradicate violence against children. The multi-religious service was televised and was singled out in the news for being part of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.

In Romania,* on 20 November, several workshops were held in different cities to address the issue of violence in schools. Participants learned about ways to manage disagreements among them in a peaceful manner. A workshop in Bucharest included refugee children among the participants.

In South Africa,* the Global Network of Religions for Children, in partnership with the Mavela Ikhaya Project, Religions for Peace and the KZN Interreligious Council, held a one-day event in Ndwedwe comprising lectures, sports, and art for peace using the “Learning to Live Together” approach.

* Activities in the countries marked with an asterisk were carried out in coordination with the members of the Global Network of Religions for Children in the respective country.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER AND ACTION
FOR CHILDREN 2015

In 2015, the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children was marked by activities and events in all five regions of the world, as highlighted below.

In Argentina,* a workshop for students about violence against children focused on peace and ecology, within the framework of the Papal Encyclical, “Laudato Si”, on care for our common home, in which the Pope asked, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina,* adults discussed how faith can prevent violence against children, and religious leaders held workshops on “Building positive relationships with children”.

In Brazil,* on 20 November, Pastoral da Criança met with religious leaders, including children of different religious backgrounds, to participate in the “Day of Life” celebration, including an interreligious prayer for children.

In Cambodia, members of youth and inter-faith communities from the three main national religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) used a video link over Sun TV to share aspects of their daily religious practice and culture in order to show similarities and differences in their practices.



In India, the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University organized programs for children parents, guardians and teachers during the Week for the Holistic Welfare of the Child. The Shanti Ashram* organization held a workshop entitled “Every Child is a Storyteller”, giving 78 students from 18 different schools the opportunity to tell his or her own story. The organization also conducted a workshop on positive parenting for 145 people, 100 of whom were parents.

In Kenya,* on 20 November, a one-day campaign was organized for internally displaced children living at a camp for the Turkana people in the northwest of the country. The campaign was aimed at raising their awareness of measures to eliminate violence against children.



In Pakistan, the Children’s Advocacy Network (CAN Pakistan) organized a media forum on the importance of engagement of religious scholars to protect children from abuse and exploitation. Religious scholars spoke about their role in the prevention and protection of children from different forms of abuse and exploitation. A social harmony was created between the Children Advocacy Network as a leading group actively advocating for child rights and protection.

In South Africa,* the Global Network of Religions for Children-South Africa and Religions for Peace joined together to hold a candlelight peace vigil, arts and crafts fair and a workshop for children.

In Turkey, in collaboration with the Turkish non-governmental organization ENKAFED, the Women’s Platform of the Journalist and Writers Foundation

invited elementary and middle-school students from Turkish, Greek, Armenian and Jewish schools to join in a prayer session in memory of the three-year old Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean trying to reach safety.



“Every day should be a day of the child. But on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children — celebrated on Universal Children’s Day, 20 November — I urge you to join hands with Sarvodaya in both reflection and action for a better world for our children, which starts in the home with loving families.”

Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne
Founder of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

* Activities in the countries marked with an asterisk were carried out in coordination with the members of the Global Network of Religions for Children in the respective country.

Forum on Religious Ideals and Reality: Responsibility of Leadership to Prevent Violence against Children
Geneva, Switzerland, 27 August 2015

The Forum on Religious Ideas and Reality was organized by Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, in partnership with ECPAT International, to focus the attention of the international community on the problem of violence against children worldwide including online sexual exploitation and abuse. Religious leaders from diverse faiths, including Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism, together with experts from the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society, met to address the root causes and devastating effects of such violence and to identify practical ways to prevent violence against the youngest members of the human family. Participants exchanged views from moral, religious and ethical perspectives.

Ending violence against children is widely recognized as an imperative by the international community, both secular and religious, most notably under Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda. Religious leaders and faith-based organizations are uniquely placed to use their influence and moral authority to challenge damaging traditional and cultural practices, to lead their communities to recognize and understand the dangers posed to society by such violence and to take action to protect children's lives and

promote their physical and spiritual development.

Michael Moran of Interpol, an expert in the area of preventing cybercrime against children, stated that the "community and societal values" of religious organizations are strong forces in the struggle to eliminate violence against children. International policing, "given a law, can enforce it", but it is the moral power of the faith-based organizations that can bring such laws into existence.

Dr. Susan Bissell, Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, stressed the importance, and the power, of the "over 5 billion people" who belong to religious communities around the world, and Dr. William Vendley, the Secretary-General of Religions for Peace, reinforced that message, stressing that: "We must exercise faithful creativity to harness the exquisite assets of the religious communities to tackle the issues of violence against children."

Ani Choying Drolma, a Buddhist nun and the UNICEF national Goodwill Ambassador of Nepal, known for introducing Tibetan chants to a wider spiritual community, opened the event with a song. As a young woman who had experienced violence as a child, she reminded the participants of their



"No violence against children is justifiable, and all violence against children is preventable."

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro
World Report on Violence against Children, UNICEF, 2006



responsibility to use their moral authority to stimulate greater global awareness of the situation of children at risk and the pervasive threats of violence against them, and to adopt actions to ensure that it is ended.

Kul Chandra Gautam emphasized that both Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children and ECPAT International were deeply committed to a strong partnership to end violence against children. He encouraged the participants to take action so that, long before the deadline of 2030 for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, "we can all say proudly that we not only rang the alarm bell about this epidemic of violence against children, but also helped to stem and reverse the tide of this continued violence".

Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko stressed that a bridge must be built not only between religious and secular organizations but also between religious leaders and their religious communities in order to create awareness of, and action to combat, both the sexual exploitation of and violence against children.

Hindu scholar, Professor Anantanand Rambachan, member of the Council of Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, urged religious leaders to recognize the commercial sexual exploitation of children as a pervasive form of violence in contemporary society and the need to become active in this regard, emphasizing the new threats posed by the expansion of social media and the exponential growth of information and communication technologies.

Experts John Carr and Dorothy Rozga of ECPAT emphasized the rapid expansion in the sexual exploitation of children worldwide, and echoed the statement made by Michael Moran, saying that "we cannot prosecute our way out of this problem". It is incumbent on the religious communities and faith-based organizations to organize societies to fight violence against children on all fronts. The problem was also not one to be passed over or passed on to others to resolve, as noted by Rabbi Diana Gerson of the New York Board of Rabbis, "I have to stand up for this child, because if no one does that child will be left to suffer – and if this is not my job, whose job is it?"

Participants advanced arguments for the common responsibility of all religious communities to promote the dignity of the child and the importance of non-violence within all families and in all communities. Sheikh Khalid Bentounes, Sufi Master of the Alawiya, emphasized that "this issue concerns all of humanity: we need to think again, and think differently about our religions ... to see that humanity is a body ... and that individual communities are each members of the body".

Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri of the World Council of Churches urged "a stand in protest against systems and societies that encourage violence in any form, in mourning for the men, women and children who are harmed and killed in acts of violence ... and in hope that a different reality is possible".

Forum on Religious Ideals and Responsibility of Leadership to End Violence against Children
New York, USA, 17 November 2015

The Forum on Religious Ideals and Responsibility of Leadership to End Violence against Children, on the theme “Stop Violence against Children”, was organized by Arigatou International, Prayer and Action for Children with ECPAT International and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. It included collaboration with UNICEF, Religions for Peace and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

The New York Forum, the fourth in a series of panel discussions on the same theme, brought together religious leaders, members of faith-based communities and prominent experts to reflect on the following questions:

- All religions have teachings on children and all hold children in high regard. What are the special obligations and responsibilities of religions to protect children from violence?

- How can religious leaders and their communities be active and stronger advocates for children and exercise their moral authority to end violence against children in all its forms?
- How can organizations like ECPAT assist efforts to fight the sexual exploitation of children? What kind of information or tools can be provided to help engage religious communities in this struggle to end violence against children?

Following the Forum, Religions for Peace and ECPAT International collaborated on the publication of “Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation: A Guide to Action for Religious Leaders and Communities”. Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, the Hartford Seminary, Shanti Ashram, UNICEF and the World Council of Churches, as partner organizations, contributed inputs and provided feedback during the production of the guide.



“My Faith”

Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children have joined other faith-based organizations in support of the development of the “My Faith” digital platform, first presented at the two forums on Religious Ideals and Responsibility held in Geneva and New York in 2015. The series explores religions and beliefs around the world through the eyes of children. Narrated by a child, each episode will be structured around recurring content elements, such as celebrations, rituals and common, everyday events. The series will use social media to promote changes in attitude in audiences, both young and old, by providing fresh ideas and the spiritual viewpoints of children, highlighting the elements that unite people everywhere – peace, tolerance and understanding.

Human Trafficking as a Form of Violence against Women and Children – Panel discussion held during the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
New York, USA, 17 March 2016

The Journalists and Writers Foundation, the Peace Islands Institute and Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children co-hosted a panel discussion on “Human Trafficking as a Form of Violence against Women and Girls” on the margins of the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Representatives of civil society and faith-based organizations who attended the meeting emphasized the need for practical solutions and strategies to address the alarming worldwide rise in the number of trafficked children, and the targeting of children in this context as a form of modern slavery.



Child trafficking was listed as one of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World

Conference on Women in 1995, and it is still an issue at the top of the global agenda today, more than 20 years later. Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, Goal 16.2 specifically addresses the need to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”.

The plan of action advanced by the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons emphasizes the vital involvement of civil society and faith-based organizations in raising awareness of the need to protect vulnerable groups, especially women and children. The strategy advanced by UNICEF is focused on “supporting parents, caregivers and families” and “changing attitudes and social norms that encourage violence and discrimination”, as set out in its 2014 report, *Ending Violence Against Children: Six Strategies for Action*.

Inter-faith forum on violence against children
Saint Thomas Aquinas University, Bogotá, Colombia
13-14 July 2016

The Global Network of Religions for Children – Colombia, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, Interfe, UNICEF, ECPAT International and ECPAT Colombia, World Vision and Plan International and co-organized the multi-faith forum on violence against children, hosted by Saint Thomas Aquinas University in Bogotá.



The regional forum was one of a series of panel discussions organized by Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children in New York, Geneva and Tokyo in 2014 and 2015, focusing on the responsibility of religious leaders to take part in the international movement to eradicate violence against children throughout the world.

The forum took place at an historic moment, with the Government and the revolutionary forces on the verge of signing an agreement to end the long armed conflict that had ravaged the country, in particular its children, for

over 50 years, and to commit both sides to rebuilding a peaceful society.

Members of the Global Network of Religions for Children from a number of other countries in Latin America, including Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador and Panama, in responding to the situation of children at risk, presented ideas and introduced best practices taken from their own national experiences.

In Colombia, the prolonged internal conflict, persistent inequality and social exclusion have disproportionately affected children under 18 years of age, including children in indigenous communities, where the conflict has been long-lasting and severe.

Deep concern was expressed that the road to reconstruction and reconciliation in Colombia, once the peace accord was signed, would not be an easy one if these problems, and the continued impunity granted to those parties responsible for acts of violence against children, were not addressed and tackled head on.

The forum aimed to create a constructive dialogue among religious leaders and representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations on building a culture of peace, with the



aim of forming strategic alliances and deciding on concrete actions for children's rights and safety. It focused on three themes: the prevention of violence in the family; the prevention of the commercial sexual exploitation of children; and the participation of children in building a culture of peace and preparing for peaceful coexistence in a post-conflict society.



The central role and the importance of the "real and legitimate" participation of children in resolving all issues under discussion was brought to the fore, and

it was stressed by all sides that children had the right to raise their voices and to have their opinions heard in all spheres of social interaction.

In the Commitment by the Alliance of Religions for Children and Youth, adopted as the outcome document of the regional forum, participants pledged to:

- **Ensure** that Colombian children are given space to participate in peace negotiations, under areas such as truth, justice and the pardoning and reconciliation processes, as well as in peacebuilding and decision-making pertaining to their future;
- **Listen** to children's voices and concerns about the violence they have experienced, and their need for safety; educate communities about the damage caused by violence, and the danger posed when it is viewed as an acceptable form of discipline;
- **Provide** resources for families from within the religious community to ensure better communication between parents and their children;
- **Take up** a proactive role in defense of children facing violence, including their sexual exploitation;
- **Implement** formal and non-formal education initiatives on ethical values and the role of children in peacebuilding;
- **Work together** as an inter-faith community to protect children and their rights, in cooperation with governmental bodies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, in order to provide children with access to resources, and to adopt initiatives for the elimination of violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other forms of abuse;
- **Share** information, resources and expertise for the protection of children; and to take part each year in the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.

How Can Prayer Help Build a Better World for Children? Prayer and Action for Children

Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, USA, 13 November 2016

Religious leaders gathered at the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, to take part in a discussion organized by Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, focused on the importance of multi-faith prayers in bringing about concrete action to end violence against children. A multi-faith prayer service followed the discussion.

The Hartford Seminary, a non-denominational graduate school for religious and theological studies, founded in 1834, is the leading forum for Muslim-Christian dialogue. Providing a multi-faith environment, the Seminary is committed to strengthening religious communities through research and education.

The multi-faith prayer celebration included prayers in the Hindu, Buddhist, Orthodox Christian, Pentecostal Christian, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish traditions, and representatives of all these communities spoke at the event.

Professor Anantanand Rambachan, speaking from the Hindu perspective, stated that “There is too much prayer and action in our world that assumes the identity of our own narrow interests with those of God and thinks of God as the cheerleader for our nation, our community, our religion”, adding that “No religious tradition is innocent in this regard”.

Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko welcomed the meeting as a bold step in interreligious dialogue, stressing that: “At the heart of all religious traditions is prayer, worship, meditation ... we believe that prayer, in whatever tradition, and in whatever form, one prayer after the other testifies to our concern that the plight of children matters to all of us.



We will fill the heavens and the earth with our cry, our sigh, our hope, our trust that children matter veneration, devotion, liturgy for the sake of our children, not to make it an instrument or tool but to place the plight of children at the heart of our faith.”

Dr. Heidi Hadsell, President of Hartford Seminary pointed out: “When we say “Prayer and Action” out in the world, it signals that we’re not a secular NGO. These are faith communities, though we work with others who are not faith communities. It signals something important. It tells people who we are. Prayer and Action, to the people on the receiving end, many of whom are religious, is an added basis of trust.”



Fourth International Family Conference: Children’s Rights and Family

Abuja, Nigeria, 19-20 November 2016

The Fourth International Family Conference, a biennial conference organized by the Women’s Platform of the Journalists and Writers Foundation, was held in collaboration with the Ufuk Dialog Foundation and Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children.

Participants heard international experts from 18 countries speak on topics covering: the best interests of the child; models of positive parenting; freedom of religion and belief; child privacy; preservation of the identity of the child; ethics education; families and children in war and conflict and child migrants and refugees.

Delivering a keynote speech, Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko spoke on “The Family and the Convention on the Rights of the Child”, emphasizing that two institutions embrace the child: the family and the Convention.

The family is the closest to the child, while the Convention is a universal instrument, and the most widely approved and ratified treaty on human rights in history. Children have their most intimate relationships through their families, and their most universal protections through the Convention.

Reverend Ucko highlighted the significant improvements brought about in the lives of children, including: an overall reduction over the past 10 years



in the number of children at risk through coordinated international action; a reduction in the under-five mortality rate; an increase in the number of children enrolled in school; and a falling death rate among children suffering from communicable diseases. Furthermore, and importantly, this progress has been made visible to the world community through the efforts of international organizations and improvements in media communications.

Reverend Ucko emphasized that, in spite of such progress, it was still all too evident that children are always the first victims of war and conflict, leaving them at particular risk of becoming refugees, street children or child workers. Stressing the role of religious communities in helping children at risk, he called on participants to remember that:

“The connection to childrearing is connected to divine origins and our connection with the divine. Raising a child is a gift reverberating with the divine.”



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

As part of the global faith-based community, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children also partners with a number of faith-based organizations and networks, including Religions for Peace; Rishho-Kosei-Kai; Pastoral da Criança, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; and the World Council of Churches.

The biennium 2015-2016 was an active and challenging time for Arigatou International and for religious communities worldwide. During this time, the United Nations, through its funds and agencies, in particular the Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development, reinforced its call on faith-based organizations to join efforts

to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 which include putting an end to violence against children.

Arigatou International has established partnerships around the goal of eliminating violence against children, including with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. Collaboration and the sharing of resources between religious communities, from the grassroots level on up, have proven time and time again to be the best way to ensure progress in the field of children’s rights and in light of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – the rallying cry for all its work.

ECPAT International



In 2015, the Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children worked with ECPAT International to promote the 20th anniversary of the first World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the 10th anniversary of the

issuance of the United Nations *World Report on Violence against Children*. ECPAT, a global network of 90 organizations working together in over 82 countries for the elimination of all forms of child sexual exploitation, seeks to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial

sexual exploitation. ECPAT has been advocating on behalf of vulnerable children and child victims of sexual exploitation for the past 25 years, including the co-organization of three World Congresses against the sexual exploitation of children (Stockholm (1996), Yokohama (2001) and Rio de Janeiro (2008)).

As noted earlier, on 27 August 2015, the two organizations co-hosted the Forum of Religious Ideals and Reality: Responsibility of Leadership to Prevent

Violence against Children in Geneva. In preparation for the forum, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children worked with Rain Barrel Communications, a pro-social consulting group, to carry out interviews with religious leaders and representatives of other faith-based organizations to gather statistical and other types of information. Together they developed an ECPAT strategy for engagement with religious communities to fight sexual abuse in all regions of the world.



International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development

Arigatou International has recently joined the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), an initiative of the Government of Germany. The Partnership brings together bilateral donor countries, multilateral development agencies and civil society and faith-based organizations to harness the positive impact of religion in the field of sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. With a focus on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, it provides a platform to ensure that the commitment of the secular community to “leave no

one behind”, as stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is connected to a globalization of the golden rule, common to all religious and ethical traditions. Its mission statement points out that “despite different motivations and backgrounds, partnerships between religious and secular actors rely on a strong mutual agreement that universal human rights and religious values, such as human dignity, go hand in hand.” The members and partners of PaRD aim to “shape the discourse on religion and development on a global stage.”

Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative

Arigatou International joined 52 faith-based organizations in the adoption of the call to action “Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative”. The initiative is based on the belief that it will be possible to bring an end to extreme poverty by he year 2030.

Based on evidence provided by the United Nations and the World Bank, which points to the remarkable progress over the past two decades to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty, it is now possible, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for the international community to bring an end to extreme poverty within 15 years.

Thus, for the first time in human history, it is not only possible to envision a world free of extreme poverty — it can be made a reality. “Accomplishing this goal will take two commitments: to act guided by the best evidence of what works and what doesn’t; and to use our voices to compel and challenge others to join us in this urgent cause inspired by our deepest spiritual values”.

The faith community embraced this goal out of its shared belief that the moral test of our societies is how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring, and because the sacred texts common to all religions call on people of faith to work to combat injustice and to uplift the poorest in our midst.



Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities

Prayer and Action for Children represents Arigatou International in the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, a platform created in 2012 for international collaboration on evidence about the activities and contributions of faith communities to community health and wellbeing. The initiative brings together international humanitarian and development organizations, United Nations agencies, academic institutions and faith-based and religious bodies for collaboration. Together, these groups generate and communicate robust evidence to policymakers and practitioners to transform the quality, effectiveness and

impact of partnerships between faith groups and the humanitarian and development communities. The initiative was formed in light of the fact that while their capabilities are powerful, faith-based organizations and networks are often underused and their capacity unknown by other institutions. But closely aligned with their congregations and communities, they are trusted and accessible resources of singular value, particularly to those in need.

The founders of the initiative, emphasize that the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals by



the United Nations requires an “all hands on deck” approach to harness the distinctive assets of religious and faith-based organizations in national plans and global collaboration. This initiative works with its members and numerous partners worldwide to review the evidence on local faith communities and religious engagement in order to better inform religious groups through a wide range of practical tools. One of its products, the “Guide to Excellence in Faith Groups”, is a living document,

which is updated regularly. It aims to support the gathering and sharing of evidence by religious and faith-based organizations about their work to alleviate poverty and enhance the wellbeing of their local communities. Among other topics, the initiative has recently created a learning hub to address violence against children. More information about the Guide is available at the website of the Joint Learning Initiative.

South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)



Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children works in consultative status with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children,

a regional organization of eight countries established in 2010. Violence against children encompasses all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. This definition includes exposure of children to violence in all settings, including the home, the community, schools, institutions and workplaces, as well as in development and emergency settings.

The South Asia Initiative, through its regional secretariat in Kathmandu, focuses its substantive work on preventing violence against children under five thematic areas: child marriage; corporal punishment; sexual abuse and exploitation; trafficking; and child labor. Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children, with World Vision, is one of the coordinators working to establish an inter-faith platform for the work of the South Asia Initiative. The members of the Global Network of Religions for Children in South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) participate in this effort.

Towards the Fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children

Ending Violence Against Children: Faith Communities in Action

Panama, 9-11 May 2017

The Fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children will be held on the theme “Ending Violence against Children: Faith Communities in Action”.

Over 400 religious leaders, members of diverse faith communities, leaders of faith-based organizations, representatives of the United Nations and international and grassroots organizations from around the world will attend the gathering – the first such meeting of global faith-based organizations held to address the issue of violence against children.

From 6 to 8 May 2017, in lead-up to the Fifth Forum, 60 children-delegates will discuss and make recommendations for the “Shared Commitment and Call to Action” to end violence against children – the outcome document of the Forum.

The work of the Fifth Forum will be solution-focused on the role of faith communities under three thematic areas: “Protecting Children from Violent Extremism, Gang Violence and Organized Crime”; “Nurturing Spirituality and Ending Violence in Child Upbringing”; and “Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children”. The growing phenomenon of online child sexual exploitation and abuse will also be discussed.

Each theme will include discussions on the following three aspects: (a) “Learning and Sharing”, in order to highlight the scale and impact of violence against children and to facilitate exchanges among participating individuals and organizations; (b) “Shared Commitment and Call to Action”, in order to formulate concrete strategies and plans of action for the Global Network of Religions for Children; and (c) “Building Partnerships to End Violence against Children”, in order to strengthen collaboration across the Global Network of Religions for Children by increasing the efficiency of and collaboration among its partner organizations.

Faith-based organizations and religious leaders can act, using their social capital and moral authority, in mitigating, preventing, reducing and ultimately ending violence against children. The Fifth Forum envisions an end to the tolerance of violence against children and to its elimination, and seeks to generate a major new global impetus to accomplish this vision in partnership with Governments, intergovernmental, multilateral, faith-based and non-governmental institutions.



Dr. Mustafa Ali
Secretary-General, Global Network of Religions for Children

We work for and with children. All we do is for future generations – for children. Our slogan is “creating a better environment for children”. Creating a better environment for children also means that we have to work with religious and political leaders to create a better environment for children. We cannot have violence against children in our homes and still expect to have peaceful communities; we cannot look at children simply as passive recipients, as if they don’t have a mind of their own. Our work with the media, religious and traditional leaders to change the negative narrative is part of our mandate and work to create a better environment for children.

Monsignor Sidney Fones
Chairman, GNRC Fifth Forum International Organizing Committee

In most countries in Latin America there are glaring socioeconomic disparities between rich and poor, with far too many people, especially in Central America, living in circumstances of extreme poverty. In spite of these differences, or perhaps because of them, our interpersonal relationships are open, friendly and positive. We believe that “personal relations make the difference”; they are a dearly cherished social good.

In Latin America we experience our religious lives in a natural and forceful way. We will meet together in Panama, in this shared cultural landscape, to outline paths of hope for the millions of children who have been given to our care – for the many who need us, and who need to be lifted out of conditions that prevent them from becoming future builders of peace.

The Right Reverend Julio Murray
Chairman, GNRC Fifth Forum Hosting Committee
Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Panama

The most important goal that a human being can achieve is not to simply create a state of comfort, self-satisfaction and pleasure. The final goal is achieved by upholding the freedom of every human being, by raising and defending the dignity of our neighbors and by getting closer to the humility and nobility of our creator.

Members of the Council of Arigatou International –
Prayer and Action for Children

Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam

Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko

Former Program Executive, Interreligious Relations and Dialogue, World Council of Churches

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TRIBUTE
TO OUR FOUNDER



Reverend Takeyasu Miyamoto (1917 – 2015), Leader of Myochikai, and the founder of Arigatou International and the Global Network of Religions for Children, was the driving force behind the establishment of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. His work in bringing together people of different faiths from around the world committed to “making a contribution from the religious perspective to the promotion of child rights in the 21st century” stands as a memorial to his life of service to the very youngest members of the global family. The passing of Reverend Miyamoto in March 2015 is mourned by people of faith and their friends and partners in the secular community around the world: they honor his memory, and are guided by the example of his leadership and spiritual energy.



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