



2018 Report

# World Day of Prayer and Action for Children



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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<sup>1</sup> the impact that collaborative work between religious communities, faith-based organizations, UN agencies, governments, civil society and secular organizations has in protecting children from all forms of violence.

Initiated in 2008 by Arigatou International, the **World Day of Prayer and Action for Children** celebrated every year on Universal Children's Day and the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – 20 November – 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.



<sup>1</sup> 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.

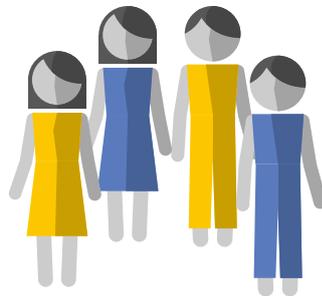
## Scope of the World Day 2018

The World Day 2018 was celebrated in **33 countries** in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East,<sup>2</sup> thanks to the support of **35 partners** and **GNRC members** that undertook **98**

**actions** and reached out **22,910** people. The World Day brought together a total of **14 religious communities**<sup>3</sup> represented in the 85% of interfaith actions that took place in 2018.<sup>4</sup>



**Celebrated in 33 countries**



**35 Partners and GNRC members**



**Undertook 98 Actions**



**Brought together 14 religious communities**



**Reached out to 22,910 people**

<sup>2</sup> See annex I for list of countries and number of participants.

<sup>3</sup> Bahai, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Kimbanguist, Muslim, Seicho No-Ie, Sikh, the World Messianic Church, and the Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Church.

<sup>4</sup> See annex I for details of religious communities represented per country.

## Issues Addressed through the World Day Actions



Over the years, the GNRC members and implementing partners have put great efforts into making the World Day an opportunity to build dialogue between different faith communities. In this edition, those efforts were focused on the prevention of violence against children and the promotion of children's rights. Celebrations in Bhutan, Comoros, Cuba, Ecuador, South Africa and Pakistan emphasized the importance to uphold children's dignity through the revindication of their rights. Marches, prayers and forums called for governments and religious leaders' actions to protect children and to listen to their views. One of the main achievements of this year's celebration was

putting in practice the Panama Commitments by addressing key issues affecting children including: sexual abuse and exploitation; domestic violence and corporal punishment; children on the move; school violence; structural and institutional violence; discrimination and gender-based violence, and violent extremism:<sup>5</sup>

### Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children

In Peru, the "Breaking the Silence" campaign was the platform that the GNRC members created to advocate for actions to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Workshops in schools, media tours, children's

<sup>5</sup> See annex II for topics/issues addressed by the World Day in each implementing country.

messages, and interfaith prayers called for awareness raising and actions to protect children from trafficking and exploitation. In Burundi, this issue was prioritized in the context of girls doing domestic work; a very complex situation in which several girls end up physically and sexually abused by their employers. Christian and Muslim religious



leaders learned and reflected on the issue, and their role in protecting girls at risk. Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Uganda also agreed during the World Day celebration on the relevance to condemn any act of abuse of children, especially those that have been justified on the name of religion. The value and role of the family according to the foundational texts of their religions, were quoted to underline the responsibility that parents and caregivers have in protecting children from harm. Online sexual exploitation was addressed by the World Day actions in Nepal and Sri Lanka, where year-round trainings and workshops are taking place in schools to raise awareness about the risks that children face in the digital world and ways to prevent them. In Sierra Leone the GNRC brought together Christian and Muslim religious leaders to address sexual abuse of children and the role of religion in preventing it. Reflections included the importance of education, the prevention of child marriage

and FGM, and the strengthening of parents'/ guardian responsibility on child upbringing.

## Domestic Violence and Corporal Punishment

GNRC members in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Panama, and Romania, focused efforts in promoting positive parenting and raising awareness on the impact of physical and verbal violence in child-upbringing. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Dominican Republic and Romania the World Day celebration included prayers, workshops and activities with parents to build their capacities on ways to create safe environments within the family that support the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development of children. In the Democratic Republic of Congo and Panama the actions included prayers and a strong focus on children's participation to share their messages to different stakeholders responsible for children's protection. Their messages addressed the need to increase



communication between children and their parents; to acknowledge parents' responsibilities as main caregivers of children; to encourage actions from religious leaders to advocate for children's protection; and pledges that call for more actions from civil society organizations:<sup>6</sup>

*"We, children and adolescents, members of different religious traditions and faith communities of Panama, within the framework of the celebration of the Day of Prayer and Action for Children request to our parents more communication and that they take into account our opinions; We ask them to be more careful with what they tell us, because in moments of anger, words can hurt more than actions. To our religious leaders we urge their intervention with parents and local authorities, so that they pay attention to children who are unprotected and who are at risk of suffering violence on their way to school or home. Children need to feel they are protected by their religious leaders."*

## Children on the Move

The countries where the World Day actions addressed the issue of migrant, refugee, and displaced children reveal the regions where most children on the move are coming from. GNRC-Colombia, for example, brought together in the National Congress key stakeholders including the government, UNICEF, and Bahai, Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders to exchange about the actions that religious communities are undertaking to respond to the Venezuelan crisis. The Forum "Religions and Venezuelan Migrant Children" aimed at analyzing the current situation that Venezuelan children and their families



face — especially the situation of violence — hoping that this initiative will enhance the creation of a network of strategic alliances for the care of Venezuelan migrant children. Syrian and Iraqi refugee children were the focus of action for the World Day celebration in Jordan, where Christian and Muslim off-camp refugee children were able to express through music instruments their exile experience, and hope for integration in their destination country. In Serbia, an art contest and role play performances helped raising awareness around migrant children and the opportunities to build integration bridges between migrant children and children from Sambor city.

<sup>6</sup> See pledge that 60 children participating in the World Day celebration in DRC signed for Arigatou International.

The World Day in Malaysia prioritized the support to Rohingya refugee children through the strengthening of their communication skills. The celebration provided a platform for Rohingya refugee children and Malaysian adults to have an “honest conversation on life,” through which children could have the opportunity to express their views and share with others their journey of resilience and hope.

GNRC members in Mexico travelled to Tijuana, a Mexican city at the border with the United States of America to organize child-friendly spaces for children migrating from Central America (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) to United States, passing through Mexico. Hygiene and medical kits, food, warm clothes, shoes and toys were distributed to the children. In addition, psychological support was offered to unaccompanied children as well as legal assistance. Games and recreational activities for children supplemented the interfaith prayers that took place during the two-days actions.

## School Violence

Violence in school is an issue affecting thousands of children in the world. In Romania, the World Day celebration included a round-table discussion with Christian and Muslim students, school counselors and directors, teachers, NGO representatives and parents about forms and causes of school violence. Team work, empathetic listening and dialogue between the participants allowed understanding of the factors that keep Romania as one of the European countries with the highest rate of school violence, as well as an identification of the solutions needed. In Bosnia & Herzegovina, Christian

and Muslim children also addressed this issue during the World Day by identifying the peer violence that they have witnessed or have been victim of at school and suggested ideas to prevent it. Interfaith prayers and workshops supplemented these actions.



## Structural and Institutional Violence

The World Day actions in Argentina, Brazil and Ethiopia addressed this topic through diverse advocacy and interfaith initiatives. During 2018 GNRC-Argentina carried out various actions at different levels: at community level to empower children and youth to speak up and claim for their rights; and at national level to advocate for the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee of the



Rights of the Child, which were published in 2018 as part of the concluding observations on the implementation of the Convention in Argentina. The World Day was the platform to mobilize children and adults around the need to hold the Argentinian government accountable for the implementation of the recommendations that address, among others, police harassment. During the celebration, that brought together different stakeholders including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim participants, children shared statements on the institutional violence they face on a daily-basis:

*“Every day we are victims of repression and political and institutional persecution. [...] The lack of access to education, decent housing, the lack of health coverage, poor nutrition and lack of opportunities condemn us to a life we have not decided to live. We face hunger. We are criminalized on the basis our social origin and condition, we are excluded. That is why today we are here in this room and on these streets, to demand the immediate application of the UN recommendations. We demand solutions and State policies that protect us. We demand that the persecution against us ends. We demand education, health, welfare and decent housing. We need a state that protects us because we are not dangerous. On the contrary, we are in danger!!!”*

GNRC-Ethiopia, for example, celebrated the World Day around the issue of street violence, and particularly the situation of street children. Christian and Muslim participants and religious leaders addressed violence affecting their communities, and particularly aimed to raise awareness on the role that religious leaders have in protecting street children from the deplorable living conditions that threaten their dignity and violate their

fundamental rights. Prayers, role-plays, and story-telling allowed street children to share their reality, hoping for a better future for them and others in their situation.



## Discrimination and Gender-based Violence

GNRC-Tanzania positioned the World Day action by focusing on the right to life, survival and development of children with albinism. Emphasis was put onto myths related to albinism by giving facts and explanations on the conditions of albinism. The advocacy action aimed to raise awareness about albinism by highlighting testimonies, and inviting support from religious, secular and government stakeholders to stop stigma and discrimination that is often associated with killings, amputations or rape of people with albinism, children being mostly affected. Different stakeholders including government representatives, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, and civil society organizations joined the GNRC efforts to advocate and pray for the rights of children with albinism.

World Day actions in Brazil and Montenegro addressed the racism affecting children in their countries. In Brazil, for example, children had the opportunity to reflect on how to promote dignity and harmony in their communities highly affected by domestic violence, street



violence, racism and discrimination. Among the messages that the children mentioned, they highlighted the need for respect, love, family, education, security, affection, protection, food, health and faith. Montenegro celebrated the World Day through several activities that included workshops on discrimination and reasons for discrimination and peer violence; an interfaith visit to different religious places; a round table on “Religion and the right to belief”; and an exhibition on peer violence and how to reduce it.

In Comoros, one of the World Day actions addressed gender-based violence through a round-table discussion in which religious leaders, civil society organizations, and representatives from the Ministry of Justice and Police had the opportunity to exchange with children about the understanding of gender, the causes of gender-based violence, the victims and perpetrators, and



ways to prevent it. Children’s reflections and concerns included the support that victims are able to receive, the guarantee of their protection, and the role of parents and caregivers in the process.

India, being another context highly affected by gender-based violence, also addressed this issue during one of the World Day actions. Christian, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Sikh children joined a dialogue and shared their opinion on the shaping of societal values, its influence in the way children socialize, the gender parities, and violence against girls, aiming to explore how children visualize their collective role in pressing for progress and contributing for a world fit for all children. Other actions in India included story-telling, interfaith prayer, and workshops on child safety.

## Violent Extremism

GNRC Kenya and Lebanon focused the World Day efforts in preventing violent extremism. In Lebanon, for example, Lebanese, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian children participated in a celebration that made use of artistic and child-friendly methodologies to reflect on the root causes of violent extremism and ways to prevent it. In Kenya, the World Day was an interfaith event held for Children from Kibera Pride Children’s Home and Madrassatul Ulum Salam. The action aimed to address the dangers of recruitment of children for violent extremism and the importance to protect children from risk. The activities included interfaith prayers, dialogue, presentations, games, tree planting, singing, and dancing. Actions in Nicaragua also address the importance of promoting respect and ethical values in order to avoid and prevent radicalization.

## 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:** UNICEF; Police; and representatives of the Federal Parliament.
- **Bhutan:** District Youth Manager
- **Burundi:** Ministry of Human Rights and Gender
- **Colombia:** UNICEF; Ministry of Interior; Parliamentarians; universities and schools.
- **Comoros:** UNICEF; National Commissioner on Gender, Solidarity and Social Protection; National Commissioner on Poverty; University of Comoros, Police, and Ministry of Justice.
- **India:** UNESCO
- **Mexico:** UNICEF; UNHCR; Government of Tijuana; National Institute of Migration; and civil society organization that are part of the Alliance for the Protection of Children in the Northern Triangle.<sup>7</sup>
- **Panama:** UNFPA; and National Secretariat for Children and Family (SENNIAF).
- **Peru:** UNICEF
- **Tanzania:** Dodoma District Commissioner.
- **Uganda:** Secretariat for Education
- **Serbia:** IOM; Ministry of Youth and Sports.

<sup>7</sup> This Alliance was an outcome of the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum.



## Annex I

Country	World Day Topic/Issue
Argentina	Structural violence and institutional violence.
Brazil	Violence prevention and child rights, school violence, domestic violence, structural and institutional violence, and discrimination.
Bhutan	Violence prevention and child rights, and domestic violence.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Structural and institutional violence, school violence, and domestic violence.
Burundi	Sexual abuse and exploitation.
Colombia	Children on the move.
Comoros	Violence prevention and child rights, and gender-based violence.
Cuba	Violence prevention and child rights.
Dominican Republic	Domestic violence.
Democratic Republic of Congo	Domestic violence.
Ecuador	Violence prevention and child rights.
El Salvador	(Pending)
Ethiopia	Violence prevention and child rights, and structural and institutional violence.
India	Violence prevention and child rights, and gender-based violence.
Jordan	Children on the move.
Kenya	Violent extremism.

Lebanon	Children on the move, and violent extremism.
Malaysia	Children on the move.
Mexico	Children on the move.
Montenegro	School violence, and discrimination.
Nepal <sup>8</sup>	Sexual abuse and exploitation.
Nicaragua	Violence prevention and child rights, and violent extremism.
Pakistan	Violence prevention and child rights.
Panama	Violence prevention and child rights, and sexual abuse and exploitation.
Peru	Sexual abuse and exploitation.
Romania	School violence, and domestic violence.
Serbia	Violence prevention and child rights, and children on the move.
Sierra Leone	Sexual abuse and exploitation.
South Africa	Violence prevention and child rights.
Sri Lanka <sup>9</sup>	Sexual abuse and exploitation.
Tanzania	Discrimination.
Uganda	Domestic violence.
Uruguay	(Pending)

**Pending Countries:**<sup>10</sup>

Uruguay

El Salvador

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

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

10 Up to week of 4 March 2019.



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INTERNATIONAL | Action  
*All for Children*





**“One of the ways we can build a better future for our children is by empowering them through allowing them to speak up for themselves. The rights of children must, importantly, include the right to be themselves and to talk for themselves.”**

*—N. Mandela, Nov. 2003*

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