

## The Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children

### Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) Panama City, 9-11 May 2017

Challenged by the global epidemic of violence against children, we, leaders and members of the world's religious and spiritual traditions, girls and boys, women and men, from 70 countries, together with representatives of governments, the United Nations, and international and grassroots organizations, met in Panama City, Panama for the 5th Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), from 9-11 May 2017.

Building upon the GNRC's 17 years of service to the world's children, we affirm the fundamental dignity of every boy and girl. We reaffirm the moral imperative to protect children from harm, as enshrined and protected in the teachings of all of the world's religious and spiritual communities and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. We believe in the power of interfaith cooperation to transform the world.

We grieve the fact that half of the world's children endure physical, psychological or sexual violence. It is unacceptable that every five minutes, a child somewhere is killed in a violent act.

While our religions have been actively engaged in the service of children, we also grieve that every religion at times has been misused to legitimize, justify and even perpetuate violence against children. We are accountable for these shortcomings and ask for forgiveness. Today, we stand together to reject and speak out against all forms of violence against children in every setting.

The causes of violence against children are complex and varied. They include socio-economic causes such as poverty and social exclusion, and many other deeply rooted political, cultural and familial factors. Ending today's unprecedented violence against children calls for extraordinary and urgent collaboration among religious and spiritual communities, UN agencies, international and multilateral organizations, governments, civil society, the private sector, media — and, most importantly, with children. We honor children's unique contributions to, and insights about, ending violence.

Children thrive and grow in trusting relationships with people who love and care for them. Ideally, and for the most part, this happens within families. Sadly, it also cannot be denied that the home is the place where most abuses occur. Families need support to grow to become peaceful, safe sanctuaries.

We affirm that transformed religious and spiritual communities can offer moral teachings and model practices to prevent, heal, reduce and ultimately end violence against children.

We, the participants of the GNRC 5th Forum, both children and adults, resolve to do all that we can to end violence against children.

We commit to:

1. Listen to children with empathy and respect, welcome their wisdom and gifts, and continue to work side-by-side to address violence against them;
2. Ensure that our religious places are safe for all children, and especially for the victims of violence and abuse, and vulnerable children such as those with disabilities;

3. Increase our personal and institutional commitments to take concrete actions to address the challenges voiced by children at this forum;
4. Educate our leaders and communities about the different forms of violence against children and deploy resources to prevent and address it within and beyond our communities; educate children about human sexuality and what they can do to keep themselves safe; work to safeguard children from harmful media content and engage the media in preventing violence against children;
5. Partner with global programs such as End Violence and make the most of existing tools for addressing the root causes and drivers of the violence children face, with a special focus on countering violent extremism, gang violence, harm to children by organized crime, and sexual exploitation and abuse;
6. Strengthen local communities by offering education in positive parenting and ethical values to help families and children develop empathy, become more resilient, and grow spiritually;
7. Identify and challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate violence against and sexual exploitation especially of girls;
8. Embrace internationally agreed strategies and mechanisms to address violence against children, including 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;
9. Strengthen cooperation and partnerships across Arigatou International initiatives, the wider religious and spiritual communities and strategic players at local, national, regional and global levels;
10. Work to generate greater social and political will for legislation, policies, and increased funding of programs to protect children from violence.

In all of this, we will strengthen our mechanisms for continuous self-evaluation and accountability to ensure our communities are never complicit in perpetuating violence against children, build child-safe institutions, and build evidence for the effectiveness of faith-based approaches to end violence against children.

Finally, we thank Arigatou International and its partners for bringing us together for the GNRC Fifth Forum. We share the conviction that we are all responsible to every child in the world. We leave here reinvigorated and inspired by the vision of a peaceful world for all girls and boys.

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