

# FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION



**WHAT RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CAN DO  
TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

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## FOREWORD

*Religions for Peace* and UNICEF have long partnered for children. Working together, we are committed to ensuring that all societies uphold the rights and advance the well-being of children. In particular, we recognize that religious communities can be unique and irreplaceable agents in protecting and nurturing children. In addition to caring for today's children, religious communities have the capacity to shape the priorities of future generations to uphold children's rights.

Children are – too often – not protected. Violence affects millions of children every day. Often, even in places that should provide safety and nurturance – homes and schools – children experience fear and abuse. This is deeply wrong. *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF are committed to a stronger alliance to combat this violence.

Following the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF initiated an inter-religious reflection and dialogue that led to the 2006 'Multi-religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children' (the Kyoto Declaration). The Kyoto Declaration is a testament to the shared recognition of the inherent dignity and value of children. It also calls all religious communities to join in an alliance to protect and promote the well-being of children.

It is time to harness our collective energies to advance our shared vision of a future free of violence against children. It is time to transform our shared values into action. *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF are pleased to present this guide to help religious communities harness their spiritual, moral and social strengths to prevent, respond to and eliminate violence against children.

For children's sake, it is our hope that these pages will inspire and energize greater collaboration among religious communities and all men and women of good will to protect and advance the well being of children.



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## ACRONYMS

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CCNV	Churches Network for Non-Violence
CRIN	Child Rights Information Network
CSO	Civil society organization
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
GNRC	Global Network of Religions for Children
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PHILINC	Philippine Interfaith Network for Children
SACC	South African Council of Churches
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCRP	World Conference of Religions for Peace (now known as <i>Religions for Peace</i> )
WHO	World Health Organization

## DEFINITIONS

**Child**, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, refers to “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

**Violence**, as defined in Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, refers to “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.”

**Religious communities** refer to both men and women religious actors and structures within religious traditions and organizations at all levels – from local to global. These include grassroots and local communities, leaders, scholars, practitioners, youth groups, women of faith networks, faith-based organizations and denominational, ecumenical and intra-religious umbrella organizations and networks.

**Child protection**, as used by UNICEF, refers to protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse.

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Religions for Peace* and UNICEF, with input from religious leaders and child protection specialists, have developed this guide as a tool to support religious communities' work to promote child rights and to prevent and respond to rights violations, in particular violence against children.

The guide is intended to:

- Provide a general overview of the nature and scope of violence against children that can be used for informational and educational purposes;
- Highlight the positive roles that religious communities can and do play in advocating for and contributing to the protection of children from violence;
- Stress the benefits of inter-religious coordination and collaboration in promoting children's rights; and
- Guide discussion, planning and action around child protection issues within religious communities and in larger social settings.

The guide is divided into eight sections. Following this Introduction, section two provides topical background to the subject. Sections three and four provide brief overviews of violence against children and children's rights. Section five discusses children, religion and spirituality. Section six addresses the role of religious communities in addressing violence against children and section seven – the importance of engagement with key stakeholders. Section eight provides the conclusion to the guide.



# 2

## BACKGROUND

We find strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child's development.

– Kyoto Declaration, *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan 2006

### CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE

Violence affects children in every country of the world. Girls and boys of all ages and from all social backgrounds, religions and cultures may experience violence. It occurs in schools, institutions (such as orphanages, other residential care settings and prisons), on the streets and in the workplace. Children also experience violence at home, within their family, from community leaders and by other children.

Many children, especially girls, are exposed to gender-based violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation/cutting, prenatal sex selection, female infanticide, child marriage and honour-related violence.

Although some violence against children leads to death, it often leaves no visible marks. It is one of the most serious problems affecting children today.

Violence affects children's physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being, causing lifelong damage to their health and development. Depending on its nature and severity, exposure to violence can damage the nervous system, impair development of the brain and lead to problems such as depression, substance abuse and low self-esteem.

In many states, violence against children remains legal and unchallenged. Some harmful practices are perpetrated without the intention of violence but are nonetheless violent in nature. Such practices are deeply embedded in communities' social norms and are often justified on the grounds of religion, culture or tradition.

The multi-dimensional nature of the problem of violence against children calls for a multi-faceted approach. It requires a radical change of attitudes and behaviours towards children as persons in their own right.

## ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Religious communities are uniquely positioned to prevent and respond to violence against children. There is strong consensus across religious traditions about the dignity of every child and the need to protect children from different forms of violence. The inherent rights of the child are present in the teachings and traditions of the world's major religions.

With their extraordinary moral authority, religious leaders are able to influence thinking, foster dialogue

and set priorities for members of their communities. They are frequently in positions to advocate for social and legal change. As those who are often the first to respond to problems, they have the trust and confidence of individuals, families and communities.

With almost 5 billion people belonging to religious communities, their leaders' potential for action is substantial. From the smallest village to the largest city, through districts and provinces to national and international levels, religious communities offer large networks for the care and protection of children and the safeguarding of their rights.

The scale and extent of violence against children provides a compelling and urgent call to religious communities to take action and to be actively involved in advocacy and policy-making to eliminate all forms of violence against children. Increasingly, religious leaders are speaking out as advocates for children and drawing on the teachings of their respective faiths to promote respect for children and their rights.

Religious communities are also reflecting on and confronting their own beliefs, traditions and actions. Many are challenging those who use their religion to justify, condone or ignore violence against children. As situations of abuse and neglect of children within and by religious communities have come under the spotlight in recent years, opportunities have arisen for thoughtful dialogue on the relationships among tenets of faith, religious traditions and international human rights standards. Efforts towards advocacy and reform have demonstrated a substantial commitment to safeguarding children's rights and enhancing religious communities' role in broader protection efforts.

At the 2006 *Religions for Peace* World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, almost 1,000 religious leaders from all world religions adopted the 'Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children' (the Kyoto Declaration). The Kyoto Declaration outlines ways religious communities can work to eliminate violence against children in line with the recommendations from the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against

### BOX 1. BROAD PRINCIPLES SHARED BY RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- Violence against children damages their physical, emotional and spiritual integrity.
- Universal regard for the child as a person with rights and inherent human dignity impels people of faith to join with others in rejecting all forms of violence against children.
- Respect for the human dignity of the child transcends theological and cultural differences and forms a common purpose for working together towards eliminating violence against children.
- Raising the status of children and eliminating violence against them is crucial to a more peaceful and compassionate world.

## BOX 2. RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: CHILDREN AND NON-VIOLENCE

The core values expressed in the world's major religions relate closely to human rights principles. These values are also expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Buddhism.** The numerous schools of modern Buddhism all spring from the original teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, which reject inflicting pain and harm on others. Non-violence is thus an essential feature of Buddhist conduct in the Dharma (teachings of Buddha).

Buddhism is concerned with the welfare of all beings. Sigâlovâda Sutta makes the point that if everyone develops compassion, mutual respect, courtesy and loving kindness, children will not be ill-treated. The Buddha's advice to parents is clearly to support children to become generous, compassionate, virtuous and responsible. In the Buddhist view, true compassion has the power to uproot the causes of misery and suffering in people's lives and direct them to the cause of happiness.

**Christianity.** Christians believe human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and look to the example of Jesus to live their lives. Jesus always treated the vulnerable with love and compassion.

The recorded interactions between Jesus and children demonstrated kindness and respect, and his reported words about causing children to stumble (Matthew 18:6), and the consequences for doing so are among the strongest in the New Testament. Children were central to the new social order Jesus initiated. When he set a little child in the midst of the disciples and said, "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14), he demonstrated enormous regard for children. By blessing and laying his hands on children, Jesus received children as people in their own right; he gave them status and dignity (Mark 10:16).

**Confucianism.** The traditional culture of a large portion of humanity has been shaped by Confucian principles of conduct, which, although externally strict regarding obligations among members of society – especially with one's elders – are based on deep harmony of the part with the whole. The family, as one of the smaller wholes, mirrors the harmony of the cosmos when all its members behave with respect, compassion and love toward each other. Mencius states that everyone has a heart that "can't bear to see others suffer" (Mencius 1.6) and illustrates this principle with the example of no one being able to bear the sight of a young child being thrown down a well.

**Hinduism.** Hindu culture teaches *ahimsa* (non-injury) to all creatures and warns against committing *himsa* (injury) to others, summarized in the Vedic injunction "Never injure others." In the Hindu tradition, there is no greater good than a child. Hindus believe their children are gifts from gods and products of their previous karma. Many believe that their children were related to them or were their close friends in past lives. Hindu parents are to lift their children into the higher nature of love, forgiveness, friendliness and security.

**Islam.** Islam views human life as a sacred gift from God. The Koran repeatedly stresses the sanctity of life (*hurmat al hayat*). The life of every individual – regardless of gender, age, nationality or religion – is worthy of respect. There is no distinction made between young and old, male or female.

Corporal punishment and other forms of humiliating treatment of children conflict directly with the advice of the Prophet, which recommends treating those who are under the age of seven as children (employing tenderness and compassion), treating those from age seven to 14 with care and concern, and from 14 onwards as close friends (with trust and cooperation). The noble Prophet of Islam emphasized: "Be generous, kind and noble to your children and make their manners good and beautiful."

**Jainism.** In Jainism, religion and culture have deep-rooted relevance to the development of humankind and to the moral, spiritual and philosophical aspects of life. Jainism is a religion of love, compassion, respect and the right to live, for all human beings. Jains strive to practice non-violence in action, speech and thought, and they believe in "showering love and respect towards all living beings." The Lord Mahavir has preached that equanimity is the Dharma: "Know that violence is the cause of all miseries in the world. Violence is in fact the knot of bondage. Do not injure any living thing."

**Judaism.** The birth of a Jewish child is welcomed with words of blessing (*Baruch haba, B'ruchah haba'ah*). The Talmud cautions parents from generating fear in children, citing the story of a child who died of such fear (Semakhot 2:5-6). Prayers of blessing for one's children for parents returning from worship are enjoined in the *siddur*, or prayer book. Children are to be raised in a climate promoting *tzedek* (fairness) and *kevod* (respect), and are to engage in the performance of good deeds (*mizvoh*). The Babylonian Talmud comments: "Jews are compassionate children of compassionate parents" (Betzah 32a).

Children (see Box 3).<sup>1</sup> While acknowledging that religious communities sometimes fail to protect children from violence, religious leaders committed themselves to eliminate violence against children:

We must acknowledge that our religious communities have not fully upheld their obligations to protect our children from violence. Through omission, denial and silence, we have at times tolerated, perpetuated and ignored the reality of violence against children in homes, families, institutions and communities, and not actively confronted the suffering that this violence causes. Even as we have not fully lived up to our responsibilities in this regard, we believe that religious communities must be part of the solution to eradicating violence against children, and we commit ourselves to take leadership in our religious communities and the broader society.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See Box 3 for the full text of the Kyoto Declaration.

2 *Religions for Peace, Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children*, a declaration made at the Religions for Peace Eighth World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, August 2006.

### **BOX 3. THE KYOTO DECLARATION**

#### **A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children**

As representatives of various religious communities gathered at the *Religions for Peace VIII World Assembly* in Kyoto, Japan, we are committed to confront the reality of violence that affects children in our societies. We offer our support to mobilizing the international community through the United Nations Study on Violence against Children to address these critical issues, and we are ready to work in partnership with governments, UN agencies, and other civil society actors to implement the recommendations of this study.

We find strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child's development. Our religions share principles of compassion, justice, love and solidarity that are great strengths in dealing with the difficult presence of violence in human society.

Our faith traditions take a holistic view of a child's life, and thus seek to uphold all the rights of the child in the context of its family, community and the broader social, economic and political environment. All children hold these rights equally and we must ensure that boys and girls have equal opportunities to enjoy these rights, particularly education, protection, health, social development and participation. Our religious communities are blessed to be multi-generational, and we must use this to support the active participation of children in their own development and to address issues of violence.

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None of us can address this problem alone. It requires partnerships, solidarity, and building alliances. Even as our religions have much to offer, we also are open to learning more about the development and well being of children from other sectors, so that we can each maximize our strengths. We are strongly committed to fostering effective mechanisms for inter-religious cooperation to more effectively combat violence against children.

Based on these principles and guided by the power of the Divine as it is understood in each of our traditions, we make the following recommendations and commitments, speaking to our religious communities, governments, the United Nations, civil society and to all throughout the world who have held a child in love – with tears for its pain, with joy for its life:

1. We will create greater awareness in our communities about the impact of all forms of violence against children, and work actively to change attitudes and practices that perpetuate violence in homes, families, institutions and communities, including corporal punishment, emotional and sexual violence.
2. We will promote the child as a person with rights and dignity, using our religious texts to provide good examples that can help adults to stop using violence in dealing with children.
3. We have an important obligation to teach and train our children, which involves discipline and helping children understand their responsibilities. We will educate and train parents, teachers, religious leaders and others who work with children to find non-violent forms of discipline and education that will ensure their proper upbringing and protect them from violent actions.
4. We will develop curricula to use in theological training and in parental education to raise awareness about child rights and ways to eliminate the use of violence.
5. We are committed to inter-religious cooperation to address violence and will make use of the synergies among our religious communities to promote methodologies, experiences and practices in preventing violence against children.
6. We call upon our governments to adopt legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, and to ensure the full rights of children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional agreements. We urge them to establish appropriate mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and to ensure that religious communities participate formally in these mechanisms. Our religious communities are ready to serve as monitors of implementation, making use of national and international bodies to maintain accountability.
7. We encourage religious communities and other public actors to use special days, such as the International Day of the Child, to bring public and media attention to child rights issues, particularly violence against children.
8. We call on UNICEF and the World Conference of Religions for Peace to facilitate the sharing of information and developing of resources to assist our communities to more effectively address violence against children.

**Kyoto, Japan, 28 August 2006**





# 3

## OVERVIEW OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

This pain stays with you, you don't forget, doesn't matter if you forgive that person – it stays with you.

– Teenage boy<sup>3</sup>

With these two hands my mother holds me, cares for me. This I love. But with these two hands my mother hits me. This I hate.

– Young girl, East Asia<sup>3</sup>

Violence against children knows no borders; it occurs in all countries and all segments of society. Because much of the violence against children is hidden or sanctioned by authorities and social norms, its global scale is difficult to measure. But it is clear that the problem is vast and the impact is enormous, shadowing the lives and hindering the healthy development of millions of children.

Violence against children is often not reported or even recognized as violence per se. Children may believe that the violence they suffer is normal and inevitable, or they may not know how or where to report it. A child may have no one to confide in, or he or she may be fearful of suffering further harm from the perpetrator. If the perpetrator is a family member or someone who holds a position of leadership and power in the community, children may fear not being believed. Children who have suffered rape or sexual abuse may fear isolation, stigma or shame if they speak out. In many communities, there are few, if any, means of reporting violence, and children may even be blamed if they attempt to do so.

The lack of reporting has resulted in few reliable estimates of the magnitude of violence against children. This has been further aggravated by an absence of mechanisms for harmonized and systematic data collection,

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<sup>3</sup> Kwast, Elizabeth and Sophie Laws, *United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children Adapted for Children and Young People* (publisher and date unknown).

## BOX 4. FACTS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- Almost 53,000 children aged 0–17 died in 2002 as a result of homicide. The age group of 15–17 years old is most at risk, and the second high-risk group is infants.
- Each year, between 133 million and 275 million children witness frequent violence between their parents.
- As many as 80 to 98 per cent of children suffer physical punishment in their homes, with a third or more experiencing severe physical punishment resulting from the use of implements (according to studies from countries in all regions of the world).
- Between 20 and 65 per cent of school-aged children in developing countries reported having been verbally or physically bullied in the previous 30 days.
- An estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002.
- In surveys of 21 countries, at least 7 per cent of females (ranging up to 36 per cent) and 3 per cent of males (ranging up to 29 per cent) reported sexual victimization in their childhood.
- More than 64 million young women of 20–24 years old have reported that they were married or in union before the age of 18.<sup>a</sup>
- Between 100 million and 140 million of the world's girls and women have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting.
- UNICEF estimates that 150 million children aged 5-14 worldwide are engaged in child labour. The International Labour Organization estimates that more than two thirds of all child labour is in the agriculture sector.<sup>a</sup>
- At least 24 states have prohibited corporal punishment in the home.<sup>b</sup>
- At least 89 states have not prohibited corporal punishment in schools.<sup>b</sup>
- Children in detention are frequently subjected to violence by staff, including as a form of control or punishment, often for minor infractions. In 78 countries, corporal and other violent punishments are not prohibited as a legal disciplinary measure in penal institutions.<sup>b</sup>

Sources: a. UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Child Protection*, Number 8, September 2009, New York.  
b. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, *Global progress towards prohibiting corporal punishment*, August 2009. All other information from Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence against Children*, United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, United Nations Secretariat, New York and Geneva, 2006.

analysis and dissemination regarding violence against children at the international, regional and national levels. Existing statistics are often limited to criminal justice data, and available data are seldom disaggregated by age or sex. Where such disaggregated data – both qualitative and quantitative – exist, they provide important information and evidence that can inform national policies and other responses, such as information about risk factors and children's views of existing services.

The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (referred to here as the

Violence Study) is the first comprehensive global study on violence against children. It was developed over a three-year period in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including children and adolescents who shared their views and recommendations. The Independent Expert for the Study, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, presented it to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2006.

The Violence Study documents the magnitude and effects of different types of violence against children and examines what is known about its causes. The Study does not specifically address children in

armed conflict, as this topic was covered by the Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in 1996.<sup>4</sup>

The Violence Study focuses on violence against children in five key settings where it occurs:

1. Home and family;
2. Schools and educational settings;
3. Community;
4. Workplace; and
5. Care and justice institutions.

The recommendations call for the adoption and implementation of legislation, policy and programmes preventing violence against children, recognizing the importance of changing attitudes and behaviours towards children, and providing services for those affected by violence. The recommendations also stress the importance of addressing the gender dimensions of violence against children to ensure that anti-violence policies and programmes are designed and implemented from a gender perspective, taking into account the different risks affecting girls and boys. Another central recommendation is to ensure participation of children – that is, to actively engage with and respect the views of boys and girls in all aspects of prevention, response and monitoring of violence.

The remainder of this chapter provides a brief overview of the Violence Study's findings.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN THE HOME AND FAMILY**

Many children first experience violence in a setting where they should feel safest – the family home. Violence by parents and other close family members may include physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as deliberate neglect. Physical violence may include hitting (spanking, smacking and striking with an implement), shaking, kicking, biting, inflicting burns, poisoning, suffocation, strangulation, forced ingestion of hot spices or other painful and potentially dangerous punishments. Psychological violence may include threatening,

isolating, ignoring, rejecting, belittling, humiliating or ridiculing the child.

Other forms of violence occurring in families include witnessing violence between parents or other family members, sexual violence (including rape or other sexual abuse) and gender-based violence.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable – in all settings – as they are more dependent on adults' care and may have fewer opportunities or capacity to speak out about abuse.

Despite evidence of violence in families, some groups defend the family from what they regard as state interference, arguing that the family is a private space where parents know what is best for their own children. Some religious groups have been strongly opposed to legal reform aimed at giving children protection from physical punishment in the home.

From a child rights perspective, every child is entitled to be protected from all forms of violence, wherefore all forms of violence against children should be prohibited by law. Legal reform alone, however, may not address violence in the most private of spaces – the family home. Fundamental changes in social norms, customs and traditions are needed to bring community-level perceptions of children's best interests in line with legal standards.



4 Machel, Graça, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, United Nations (A/51/306), 1996.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

While schools have an important role in protecting children from violence, violence in schools is widespread. As in other settings, corporal punishment administered with leather belts, canes or paddles is a common experience for millions of children. This is often accompanied by verbal aggression and psychological abuse. Parents, society and religious groups often condone corporal punishment

at school as a form of discipline. As such, institutionalized physical violence at school remains legal in many countries.

Children in school may also experience bullying from peers and teachers in the form of threats, verbal aggression, exclusion, intimidation or physical fighting. Sexual abuse may be perpetrated by other students, teachers or other adults working in the school.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY**

“The community is a source of protection and solidarity for children, but it can also be a site of violence, including peer violence, violence related to guns and other weapons, gang violence, police violence, physical and sexual violence, abductions and trafficking.”<sup>5</sup> In some areas, everyday activities such as travelling to school or collecting water put children at risk of violence, including sexual violence. Peer violence between young males tends to be more common in areas where resources are scarce, particularly if weapons are available and social norms condone violent displays of masculinity.

Particular groups of children, such as those living on the streets, refugee or internally displaced children, or children in situations of sexual exploitation are at particular risk of violence and brutality by adults, including by police and others expected to protect them.

Many girls are subjected to harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation/cutting, branding and tattooing, child marriage and female infanticide. For example, communities practice female genital mutilation/cutting believing it will ensure a girl’s proper marriage, chastity, beauty or family honour. It is perpetrated without a primary intention of violence but is violent in nature and reflects deeply rooted discrimination against girls

### **BOX 5. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

Corporal punishment takes place in many settings, including the home, schools, care systems (e.g., foster and day care) and the justice system. In some countries, children and young people can still be legally whipped or beaten as punishment for an offence. There may be a local traditional justice system or religious law where children are physically punished. Employers may use corporal punishment in situations of child labour.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines “corporal” or “physical” punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.”

The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment are forms of violence and States must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate them. It recognises that addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it in the family, schools and all other settings is not only an obligation of States under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.8, “The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment and other Cruel or Degrading Forms of Punishment” (CRC/C/GC/8), 2006.

5 United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-first session, ‘Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children’ (A/61/299), 29 August 2006, paragraph 69, p. 19.

and women that is entrenched in social, economic and political structures.

Rapid development of media and technology is also creating new environments in which children are increasingly exposed to violence by, for example, exposure to violent imagery through video and online games; production, distribution and use of material depicting sexual violence, especially sexual abuse and child abuse images; and online (Internet) solicitation of children. Technology also facilitates child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

### **VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AT WORK**

Many of the world's children engage in some form of work, which includes performing household tasks within the family or paid work at after-school jobs. This form of work can often develop a sense of responsibility and help build a skill set – if it is balanced with time to enjoy school, play and social relationships.

However, children who have to work outside the home are often at risk of violence and exploitation by employers, working excessively long hours in dehumanizing and dangerous conditions for little money. Many are denied an education and have no time for leisure. Children, mostly girls, working in the domestic setting are often invisible, placing them at even greater risk of violence and abuse, including sexual and physical abuse.

The most common forms of violence against children in the workplace are physical violence (beatings, kicking, slapping, whipping, scalding and in extreme cases even murder); psychological violence (shouting, scolding, insults, threats, obscene language, bullying, mobbing, isolation, marginalization and repeated discriminatory treatment); and sexual violence (sexual harassment, fondling and rape). Most of such violence is inflicted by employers, but perpetrators may also include co-workers, clients, foremen, customers, police and criminal gangs.

### **BOX 6. FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING**

Between 100 and 140 million girls and women worldwide have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting. In some regions of some countries, rates are as high as 71 to 99 percent – some girls are cut before the age of four.

However, progress has been made in changing the misperception that religion backs female genital mutilation/cutting. This shift has been made as a result of studies of religious texts and public statements made by religious leaders. *Children in Islam*, a study published by UNICEF in collaboration with Al-Azhar University in Egypt, is being used in the region as a resource tool in the efforts to promote the abandonment of the practice. In Egypt, the Grand Sheikh of Cairo's Al-Azhar mosque, Sayyed Mohammad Tantawi, a prominent Muslim religious leader, and the Coptic Patriarch Pope Shenouda III, have both declared that female genital mutilation/cutting has "no foundation in the religious texts" of either Islam or Christianity. In June 2007, the Egyptian Grand Mufti Sheikh Ali Gomaa made a statement that the custom is prohibited in Islam.

### **VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN CARE AND JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS**

Reports from many countries show that children in various institutions – such as orphanages, juvenile detention centres and prisons – are subjected to violence from the staff responsible for their care, as well as from other children.

Violence against children in institutions includes torture, beatings, isolation, verbal abuse, restraints, sexual assault, harassment, humiliation, bullying and psychological violence. Corporal punishment and other forms of degrading punishment are still lawful in many states and have not been explicitly prohibited in residential and penal institutions.



# 4

## OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

[The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a] luminous living document that enshrines the rights of every child without exception to a life of dignity and self-fulfilment.

– Nelson Mandela<sup>6</sup>

The delegates to this conference have articulated the importance of creating networks to address issues of children's rights. While the Holy Scripture is the basis by which we undertake this work, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will serve as a guiding framework in our advocacy.

– Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, then Archbishop of Cape Town, speaking on the Millennium Development Goals' focus on children, 2006<sup>7</sup>

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a universal standard for children's rights. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and entered into force in 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most comprehensive legal instrument for the protection of the rights of the child and has so far been ratified more widely than any other human rights instrument.

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6 Cited in Pinheiro, Paulo Sergio, "A Study that lives up to children's expectations," CRIN Newsletter, Child Rights Information Network, No. 19, May 2006, p.4

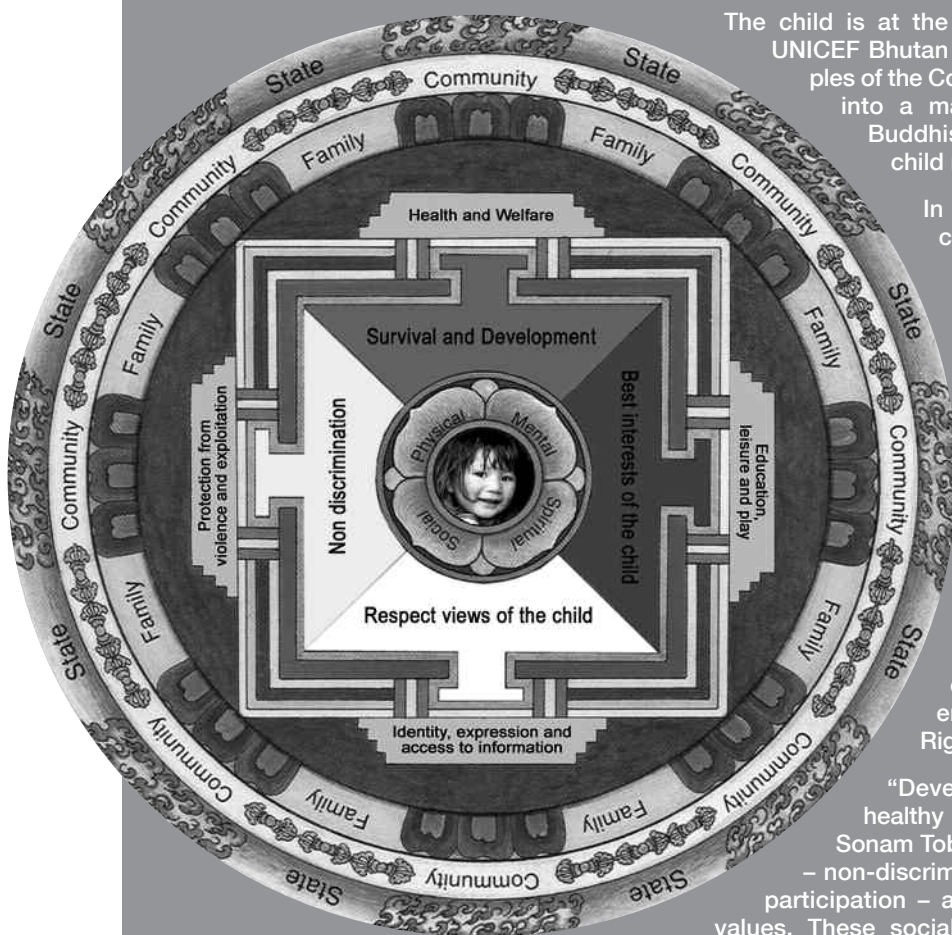
7 Cited in Ndungane, Njongonkulu, *Millennium Development Goals – Focus on Children*, Report to General Synod, TEAM, Cape Town, 2006.

Even though some provisions for protecting children’s rights have been incorporated into other international instruments, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is unique in that it delineates the first comprehensive set of rights – including social, economic, cultural and civic rights – relevant to children and recognizes

children as social actors and active holders of their own rights.

Echoing the core values of most religions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the principle that every child is born with inherent rights as a human being.

## BOX 7. CHILD RIGHTS IN BHUTAN



The child is at the heart of Bhutan’s development. UNICEF Bhutan has translated the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into a mandala, which reflects both the Buddhist approach to life and the basic child rights framework.

In Sanskrit, mandala means circle or centre. The centre is the abode of the deity, and in this case the child is placed in the centre surrounded by a series of circles and squares symbolizing the provisions and principles of the Convention. The mandala is traditionally a symbol used for concentrating the mind so that it can pass beyond superficial thoughts and focus more precisely on valued concepts progressing toward enlightening the mind. Using the mandala in this context helps to promote greater understanding of and consensus on the human rights of children as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Developing a child is like building a healthy nation,” said Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye. “The three pillars of the CRC – non-discrimination, the best interest rule and participation – are inherent in Bhutan’s Buddhist values. These social values protect the dignity, the equality and the fundamental rights of the child.”

Source: UNICEF website, ‘Report of work in Bhutan on the Rights of the Child’, 2006.



## FOUR “UMBRELLA” PRINCIPLES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

- 1. Non-discrimination** (Article 2): All children in all situations at all times have the same rights. This applies to all children – regardless of sex, race, religion, language, culture, disability, or national, ethnic and social background.
- 2. Best Interests of the Child** (Article 3): In making determinations about any action regarding children, the course to be followed is the one that is in the best interests of the child (which may not always be the same as the immediate short-term interests of adults).
- 3. Right to Life, Survival and Development** (Article 6): The right to life is the bottom line. To the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child should be ensured.
- 4. Respect for the Views of the Child** (Article 12): Children have the right to have their views on matters that affect them taken into account and given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects a vision of children in which they are social actors and members of families and communities, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their ages and stages of development. This holistic vision of the child, as well as the principles of justice, humanity and dignity articulated in the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, corresponds with the visions and principles of the



world’s religious traditions. As a universal statement of consensus about how children should be treated, it was informed by and reflects the deeply held values embedded in global religious thought.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects a vision of children in which they are social actors and members of families and communities, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their ages and stages of development.

## ARTICLES SPECIFIC TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Various articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically protect children from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Article 19 requires States Parties to “take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”

Article 34 calls upon States Parties to protect children from “all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” and to “take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.”

Article 35 requires States Parties to take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures “to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.”

Article 37 requires States Parties to ensure that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also requires States Parties to provide adequate



Importantly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies at all times, including during armed conflict. Articles 38 and 39 of the Convention respectively obligate States Parties to protect the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and to promote post-conflict recovery and reintegration.

support to children victims of violence, exploitation or abuse. Article 39 requires States Parties to “take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.”

Importantly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies at all times, including during armed conflict. Articles 38 and 39 of the Convention respectively obligate States Parties to protect the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and to promote post-conflict recovery and reintegration. In addition, article 38(1) obligates States Parties to “ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law,” reflecting the complementary nature of international humanitarian law and human rights law, specifically with regard to children.

The Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography reinforce the protection provided to children in these situations.

## **COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is the monitoring body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Comprised of

18 independent experts selected by State Parties for a four-year period, the Committee meets three times per year to review reports submitted by States Parties, as mandated in Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Reports outlining the progress made in implementation of the Convention are submitted two years after ratification and every five years thereafter. Committee guidelines for reports stress that these present, in an honest and self-critical manner, challenges to and future priorities for implementation. Reports are accompanied by relevant statistics and texts of legal documents. The aim of the reporting process is to facilitate an open and constructive dialogue with State Parties to the Convention to support cooperative action to further its implementation internationally.

In addition to the State Party reports, the Committee reviews other submissions by treaty-monitoring bodies and other mechanisms, including specialized United Nations agencies, UNICEF and other competent bodies, in accordance with article 45 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee encourages international, regional, national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – including religious organizations – to submit reports, documentation or other written information in order to provide a comprehensive picture of how the Convention and the Optional Protocols are being implemented.



# 5

## **CHILDREN, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY**

Children's well-being and their hope for the future is bound up with their understanding of themselves, their purpose and their relationship to others and with that which is variously referred to as God, the Creator, the Divine, or the transcendent.

Children are born into the world as a trust of the whole and require nurturing, love, education and training, and meaningful opportunities to be of service for their intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral development.

Children who are aware of their latent spiritual capacities and who have developed moral capability have more resilience in the face of hardship and greater ability to act in partnership with others to remedy problems and to achieve social justice.

**– National Plan of Action for a World Fit for Children,  
Bahá'í Community of Canada, 2 April 2003**



Most people acknowledge that spirituality is not solely the prerogative of people of faith and that every child has innate spirituality. This spirituality leads them to connect with and derive meaning from the world around them, including the natural environment. Children have an intrinsic sense of what is just and unjust.

As children develop, these innate sensibilities begin to be shaped more formally, primarily by the family – itself shaped by spirituality and religious belief.

Early in life many families give or expose children to religious instruction intended to impart the values, spiritual enlightenment, and perceived source of salvation that the family has enjoyed over genera-

tions. For children, being a member of a particular family means acquiring its values, beliefs, and traditions, which occurs in no small part through exposure to religion.<sup>8</sup>

As children grow and their relationships with their broader communities develop, religion further influences them through the social and cultural institutions in which they participate.

The mosque, church or temple often provides children's first point of contact with the community beyond their immediate neighbours and with wider social institutions. There, children learn not only religion but also important lessons about morals, social behaviour and their own value as human beings. They also learn subtle messages about

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8 Wessells, Michael and Alison Strang, 'Religion as Resource and Risk: The double-edged sword for children in situations of armed conflict', in Boothby, Neil et. al. (eds.), *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT, 2006, p. 205.

whether the world is a safe place, how to be a good person, and what their responsibilities are as members of a religious group. Their developing religious identity becomes part of the wider, collective identity that binds children and adults together into a people having a sense of collective meaning and place in the world.<sup>9</sup>

Given the profound impact that spirituality and religion have on children's development and socialization, there is the potential to provide strong protective influences and promote resilience. The beliefs, practices, social networks and resources of religion can strengthen children by instilling hope, by giving meaning to difficult experiences, and by providing emotional, physical and spiritual support.

Unfortunately, the same elements of religious experience can also promote or condone violence, including violence against or involving children; thus increasing the vulnerability of children faced with adversity. Violence can lead to a loss of connectedness to one another, our environment, and the sense of a higher purpose. Ultimately, violence against children not only violates a child's physical and emotional integrity, it violates a child's spiritual integrity too – especially when violence is perpetrated in the name of religion or tradition. Experiencing violence fractures children's sense of trust in others and wonder for creation and the world around them.

Nurturing a child's spirituality and promoting the protective aspects of religious belief, practice and community provide valuable resources for children whose lives have been blighted by violence. These factors can also strengthen resilience in the face of potential violence, thereby mitigating its impact. Every member of a religious community, including children themselves, can play a role in encouraging and enriching the spiritual and religious life of each child.

## Questions for reflection and discussion

- How does violence impact children's spiritual development?
- How can children's spiritual insights help solve problems of violence?
- How can spirituality become a resource for children who have experienced violence?

## Suggestions for action

- Create opportunities for the religious community to learn from children. Listen to children's insights and develop a thoughtful and respectful dialogue with children.
- As adults, model compassion, non-violence and respect for others.
- Provide opportunities to discuss ways in which children's strengths and gifts contribute to the life of family and community.



9 Ibid, p. 205.





# 6

## **ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

We all have a duty to prevent abuse and violence against children as part of efforts to ensure the welfare of humans and respect for the rights of defenceless children. We are duty bound to treat children with compassion so that they would never feel humiliated or abused.

– Grand Ayatollah Sanei, World Children’s Day, Qom, Iran, 2007

As discussed in section four of this guide, the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets high standards for children’s protection and well-being in the family, school, society and institutions – standards that religious leaders and groups are particularly well-placed to communicate and hold society accountable to. With moral standing and broad platforms, religious leaders and communities have the power and reach to help people across the entire spectrum of society to understand that violence against children is a human rights violation.

In working to prevent and respond to violence against children, religious communities can reference the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for ensuring that children’s human rights are protected and enshrined within their own legal and normative frameworks, as well as those of society at large. Religious communities can promote awareness raising and education in order to enable children and adults to become more conversant with the concepts of children’s rights, and can translate the ideals of the Convention into spiritual and religious contexts. This does not mean that religious actors have to become child rights experts; they bring their own resources to the broader work of child protection. By increasing their awareness and knowledge of child rights and protection issues, religious leaders strengthen the roles they play in their communities by furthering the ideals of dignity and human worth inherent in religious traditions.



This section presents ways in which religious communities and their leaders can use opportunities afforded by their existing roles and functions to make crucial contributions to prevent and respond to violence against children. Discussion will address specific actions that can be taken by leaders of religious denominational bodies, theologians and educators, leaders of worship, and community mobilizers.

### **OVERALL ADVOCACY AND ACTION**

Religious leaders can be powerful children's advocates. They are able to raise awareness about the effects of violence against children and to work towards preventing it by putting into action the shared values of compassion, love, non-violence and justice.

Every child is entitled to full protection under the law. Where the law does not protect children, religious leaders can raise concerns with government officials or policy makers and work with others to mobilize reform campaigns. Ending violence against children requires legal prohibition alongside education and support. People in faith-based organizations also have an important role to play in

supporting the development of implementation strategies so that laws to protect children are enacted and closely monitored.

While religious communities can effectively engage in formal advocacy around legal reform for child protection, perhaps their most powerful role is in facilitating dialogue, reflection and action regarding violence and rights violations within their cultural and religious context. This is especially true for types of violence that are inherent in social norms and local customs. By organizing and engaging communities to examine the violence perpetrated, and by fostering a collective vision of ideals and alternatives, social change brings commitments and behaviour in line with human rights standards.

### **Questions for reflection and discussion**

- What forms of violence are embedded in our religious and/or cultural traditions? How are these actions understood with regards to child-rearing?
- What protective aspects of religious belief, practice and community exist to protect children from violence?
- How are children given recognition and respect as persons and holders of human rights in the community and wider society?
- What has to be done to give children protection from all forms of violence at the national level? The local level? Within the religious community itself?
- What are the country's laws in relation to violence against children? How do religious tenets and principles compare or contrast with the legal framework?
- What is the value added and practical support offered by our religious perspectives in the efforts to eliminate violence against children?

### **Suggestions for action**

- Promote discussion within the religious community about children's rights, the experiences of

violence within or around the community, the needs for protection and how the community can work towards meeting those needs.

- Ensure children have access to information and resources about their rights as human beings in child-friendly and age-appropriate formats. Ensure that this information is available to children of various backgrounds (e.g., sex, disability, ethnic background/languages).
- Speak out and support campaigns to give children who are or have been exploited through child labour and/or exposed to other forms of violence equal opportunities for education, health care and time for recreation and play.
- Propose, support and implement initiatives in order to develop systems of support for vulnerable children and children victims of violence, exploitation and abuse, including the establishment of procedures for reporting violence to the authorities, and telephone help lines or other mechanisms for children who need protection. Highlight the need to expand community-based services for children.
- Convene meetings with local government officials and other key actors to discuss children's human rights, gender and other forms of discrimination, and existing protection from all forms violence in local services, schools, religious organizations and institutions.
- Collaborate with legal and human rights groups in order to bring about legal reform aimed at preventing violence against children and support children victims.
- Initiate a campaign or support existing efforts for law reform as a matter of urgency in states where violence in the home is not prohibited by law. Providing advice on positive parenting is very useful, though may be not enough; full protection from violence in the home for all children will be achieved only if children are given their fundamental right to protection under the law.
- Campaign for children's rights and the elimination of violence against children to be included in the school curriculum.

## **BOX 8: RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGREE ON KEY STEPS TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

The Kyoto Declaration recommends that religious communities and leaders:

- 1. Create awareness.** Create greater awareness in religious communities about the impact of all forms of violence against children. Actively work to change attitudes and practices that perpetuate violence – such as corporal punishment, emotional and sexual violence – in homes, families, institutions and communities.
- 2. Promote the child as a person with rights and dignity.** Use religious texts to provide good examples to help adults stop using violence in dealing with children.
- 3. Teach non-violent forms of discipline and education.** Make available education and training for parents, teachers, religious leaders and others who work with children to find non-violent forms of discipline and education.
- 4. Raise awareness of children's rights.** Develop curricula to use in theological training and parental education to raise awareness about child rights and ways to eliminate the use of violence.
- 5. Inter-religious cooperation.** Make use of the synergies among religious communities to promote methodologies, experiences and practices in preventing violence against children.
- 6. Adopt legislation to prohibit violence against children.** Advocate for the adoption and implementation of legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, and to ensure the full rights of children consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional agreements.
- 7. Create public awareness.** Use special days, such as the International Day of the Child, to bring public and media attention to child rights issues, particularly violence against children.

Religion does not accept any form of violence against humans, especially against children. All Muslims are duty bound to raise awareness, but for religious leaders, it is their job. We should highlight the role of religion regarding this issue.

– Ayatollah Sayed Mousavi Bojnourdi<sup>10</sup>

## RELIGIOUS LEADERS

As both advisers and administrators, religious leaders are uniquely positioned to make the problem of violence against children a critical concern and to be at the forefront of actions to prevent and eliminate it. Religious affiliations form an essential part of a community's cultural identity. Many religious denominational bodies reach large numbers of people not served by other groups, possess structures that offer practical help and support, and provide spiritual guidance.

Religious leaders have the ability and responsibility to make sure that children within their organizations and communities are protected from violence of all kinds. By modelling appropriate and respectful

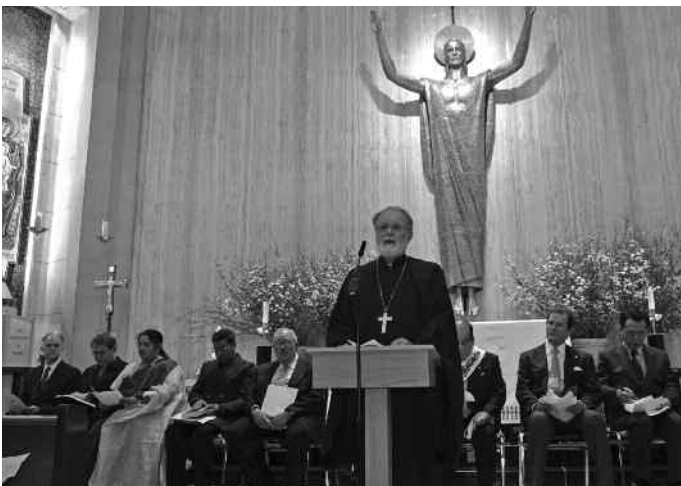
behaviour towards children, religious leaders guide community members. By facilitating dialogue and reflection within their communities, religious leaders nurture the self-awareness to question current practices and envision alternative practices that express the higher ideals of their belief systems.

### Questions for reflection and discussion

- What is the status of children in the religious organization and community?
- Are there beliefs or practices within the religious tradition that might be contrary to child rights' standards?
- What beliefs or practices within the religious tradition and community protect children from violence?
- What measures can be taken to prevent violence against children in the religious community? What is the role of leadership in leading these efforts?
- What is the appropriate role of the religious community's leadership in influencing public policy debate, such as legislation regarding children, violence and their rights?

### Suggestions for action

- Identify a focal point for children's issues in the religious community, and support that



<sup>10</sup> Ayatollah Sayed Mousavi Bojnourdi, Head of Law at the Imam Khomeini Research Institute, Tehran speaking at a press conference in Tehran following the Consultation of Religious Leaders in Toledo. Source: UNICEF Iran, 2006.

person's authority to develop and implement appropriate actions.

- Promote open and honest discussion about how culture and traditions can be used to justify violence against children, as well as how religious leaders can be agents for change so that religious organizations are places where violence against children is not tolerated.
- Ensure that the religious organization – the church, mosque, synagogue or temple – is a safe and supportive place for children. Conduct a survey of child protection policy and procedures to ensure that children are fully protected against violence. If no policies exist, make it a priority to develop such policies, with the meaningful involvement of children.
- Develop accessible ways for children to report instances of violence in the religious organization. Ensure there are confidential contact points for children to seek advice, assistance and the best quality professional care.
- Ensure that policy and practice throughout the religious organization reflect respect for children, promote equality and raise the status of both girls and boys, promoting their right to grow up free from violence and humiliation.
- Provide child protection training and guidance to all people working in the religious organization, and create clear lines of accountability and methods of evaluation to ensure children are fully protected.

### **BOX 9. THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

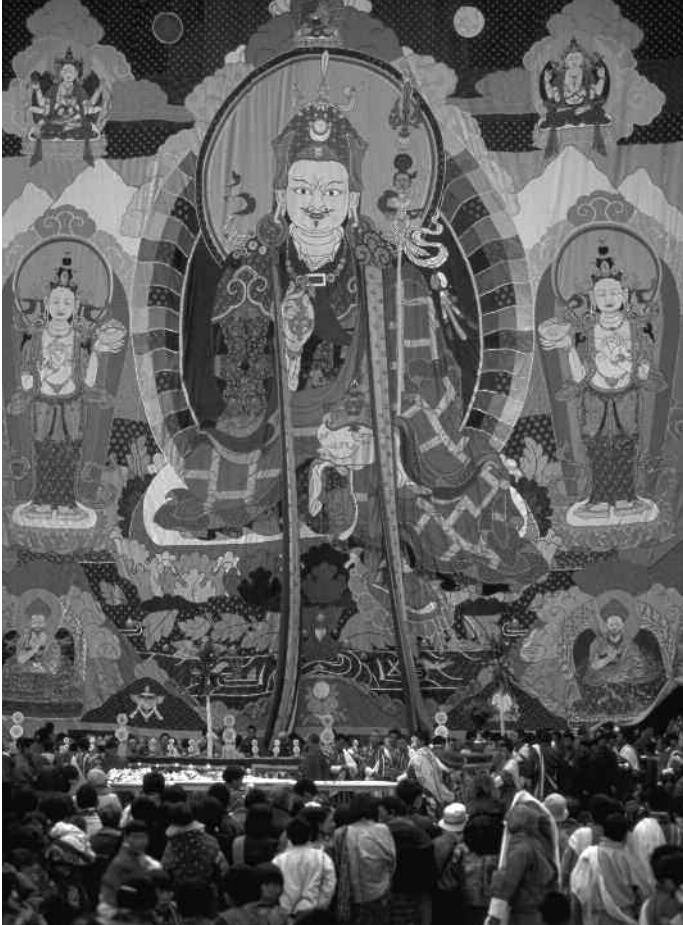
During 2007, the South African Council of Churches, an umbrella organization representing over 16 million Christians of 26 denominations in South Africa, supported by Save the Children, produced a position paper and a submission to the Portfolio Committee on Social Development. The paper explained the religious arguments against corporal punishment: "The common law does not tolerate violence against women, the aged or any adult for that matter. Neither does the common law distinguish between levels of violence, of whatever intensity on whatever part of the body and with whatever implement the beating was meted out. Likewise, we should not entertain the thought of accepting any level of violence that involves children. Children are humans too."

Source: Hemstreet, C and K. Vermeulen, *Religions, the Promotion of Positive Discipline and the Abolition of Corporal Punishment – Frequently Asked Questions*, A Position Paper, South African Council of Churches, 2007.

- Promote the principles of positive discipline in the religious organization and develop training for staff and teachers.
- Join in collaborative efforts with others seeking to influence public policy around key child rights issues, in keeping with the religious community's beliefs and priorities.

**There is no greater good than a child.** Children are entrusted to their parents to be loved and guided and protected. However, children can be a challenge to raise into good citizenship. There are many positive ways to guide them such as hugging, kindness, time spent explaining, giving wise direction and setting an example of what you want them to become.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Sivaya Subramuniaswami, *Living With Siva: Positive Parenting for Hindus*, Lesson 183: Positive Discipline, Himalayan Publications, 2002, p. 341.



## THEOLOGIANS AND EDUCATORS

Theologians and educators of all religious traditions can emphasize, in teachings and practice, the importance of children's right to grow and develop free from violence. Each religious tradition possesses rich resources within sacred texts and teachings to advocate non-violence and promote respect for the child.

Theological training affords further opportunities to develop research and study of scripture and doctrine that can be used to combat violence against children.

Religious scholars may also be responsible for religious education, including teaching and school-based counselling. These are key roles that provide opportunities to work with others towards preventing and eliminating violence against children.

Religious educators are also well-placed to develop tools and resources to address violence against children and to teach both children and adults about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Questions for reflection and discussion

- How can religious texts, teachings and doctrine from different traditions be used to promote children's inherent human right to grow up without violence?
- Are there any beliefs and practices that contribute to violence against children?
- Are there any beliefs and practices that promote the protection of children from violence?
- Does religious teaching and education convey current standards of children's rights?
- What approaches to scholarship and teaching can ensure that children's rights are respected?

## Suggestions for action

- Use the information in the Violence Study to educate people about the devastating effects of violence on children's growth and development, as well as to contextualize the challenges within one's own community.
- Identify the teachings from religious texts that promote non-violence, non-discrimination and respect for children. Include these in liturgies, prayers and religious study.
- Clarify misinterpretations of religious texts used to perpetuate violence against children and/or inequality between boys and girls.
- Teach ways of communicating and resolving conflicts without violence.
- Develop training materials to encourage theological reflection and to clarify scriptural interpretation in order to end religious belief-based justifications of violence against children.
- Challenge those who use their religion, culture or tradition to justify violence against children.

## BOX 10. SCHOLARLY RESEARCH OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS TO PROMOTE CHILD RIGHTS

### **Religious leaders in Norway take action to clarify the understanding of religious texts.<sup>a</sup>**

Church leaders in Norway agreed to a proposal from the Norwegian Ombudsman for Children that a revision of the Bible should replace the word “chastisement” in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. The Children’s Ombudsman found that children who had contacted his office and said they had been subjected to physical harm believed the violence might have been authorized by the Bible.

The Bishops’ Conference of Norway stated:

*The word “chastisement” has acquired a meaning that differs from its original intended meaning. In modern Norwegian usage, the word “chastisement” is virtually synonymous with corporal punishment. Today this word is unsuitable for reflecting what is involved when the Bible speaks of parents’ responsibility to raise and guide their children. ... We urge those working in the Church to devote greater attention to violence against children – in their sermons, education and guidance. Men and women working in the church must point out how such violence represents an infringement of human worth and is in conflict with Christian ethics.*

*In the past, corporal punishment was practiced as a part of bringing up children. Today we know that such methods of punishment are destructive and offensive to children. Many have permanent mental or physical injuries from having suffered violence during their childhood.*

### **Mauritanian Imams and the Religious Leaders Network for Child Rights research corporal punishment in the Koran.<sup>b</sup>**

In Mauritania, corporal punishment is widespread in *mahadras* (Koranic schools), secular primary schools, and within families. It is considered a suitable and effective educational method of discipline. UNICEF Mauritania analysed this phenomenon in order to find the best way to address it. Given the pre-eminent position of religious leaders in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, a partnership with the Imams and Religious Leaders Network for Child Rights was deemed an appropriate entry point. This approach is also in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, which urges close collaboration with community and religious leaders.

For its part, the Imams Network carried out a study to assess whether corporal punishment is allowed in Islam. The study concluded that violence has no place in the Koran, and thus has no place in Islam. The results of the study will form the basis of a *fatwā* (a religious opinion issued by an Islamic authority on different issues of Islamic Law and how they should be understood, interpreted or applied) barring physical and verbal violence against children in the educational system, as well as in the home. “The evidence that corporal punishment is forbidden by Islam is clear and abiding for all of us,” declared the President of the Imams Network, Hademine Ould Saleck. “We must apply *sharia* (Islamic law), which fully protects children.” Although a similar study had been carried out in Shiite Iran, this is the first study conducted within a Sunni environment. This comprehensive and unprecedented study will be widely disseminated in Mauritania (in schools, *mahadras*, mosques and families), as well as promoted internationally to gain a consensus in the Islamic world and to finally clarify Islam’s stance towards corporal punishment against children.

### **Mobilizing religious scholars to address female genital mutilation/cutting in Egypt.<sup>c</sup>**

In Egypt, data from programme evaluations indicate that religion continues to be a strong factor supporting female genital mutilation/cutting, especially amongst men. In addition, in areas where attitudes are shifting, there continue to be pockets of resistance, especially in Muslim communities. A national programme identified intellectuals and religious scholars against female genital mutilation/cutting and created an organized national religious opposition group that aims to enhance the progressive discourse of religious personnel. The group reinforces its message through media interventions and outreach to the population at large, promoting clear and consistent information.

Religious leaders’ involvement as a group, beyond the boundaries of villages and communities, helped enhance public dialogue on the topic. Furthermore, in 2008 Al-Azhar Supreme Council of Islamic Research officially issued a *fatwā* explaining that female genital mutilation/cutting has no basis in core Islamic *sharia* or any of its partial provisions, and that it is a sinful action that should be avoided.

Sources: a. Child Rights Information Network, ‘Norway: Church supports Bible rethink on corporal punishment’, News Release, 22 January 2008. b. UNICEF Mauritania Country Office, 2009. c. UNICEF 2009.

## LEADERS OF WORSHIP

Imams, ministers, clergy, rabbis, priests and other leaders of religious and spiritual worship play important roles in the individual and collective experience of their communities. On one hand, they facilitate the community's expression of worship, as well as dialogue and reflection on theological and social issues. Equally important is the role that leaders of worship play in guiding and supporting individuals of the community on their spiritual journey, particularly during periods of difficulty and adversity.

### Fostering Reflection in Worship

In religious traditions where people gather for worship, religious leaders are often in a position to encourage the community to reflect on the issue of violence against children through preaching, readings, prayers and spiritual guidance. Religious leaders have opportunities to speak about the care of children when they preside at ceremonies marking children's rites of passage, such as welcoming a new baby into the life of a religious community.

### BOX 11. A PRAYER

We come to you in gratitude for the privilege and responsibility of bringing up children, with all their capacity for wonder and delight.

We come to you also in sorrow that often our children receive so much less from us than they deserve, even to the point of abuse.

We pray that you will move in the hearts and minds of parents, teachers, lawmakers and all people everywhere with an urgent desire for respect for our children and peace for our families.

Give us humility to learn better ways than the ways of violence, and more creative paths than those of power.

For what we have received in our children make us truly thankful and for what we have got wrong with our children make us truly penitent.

Source: John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford, as cited in Churches' Network for Non-Violence, *Resources for Worship: Respecting Children*, 2008, p. 4.

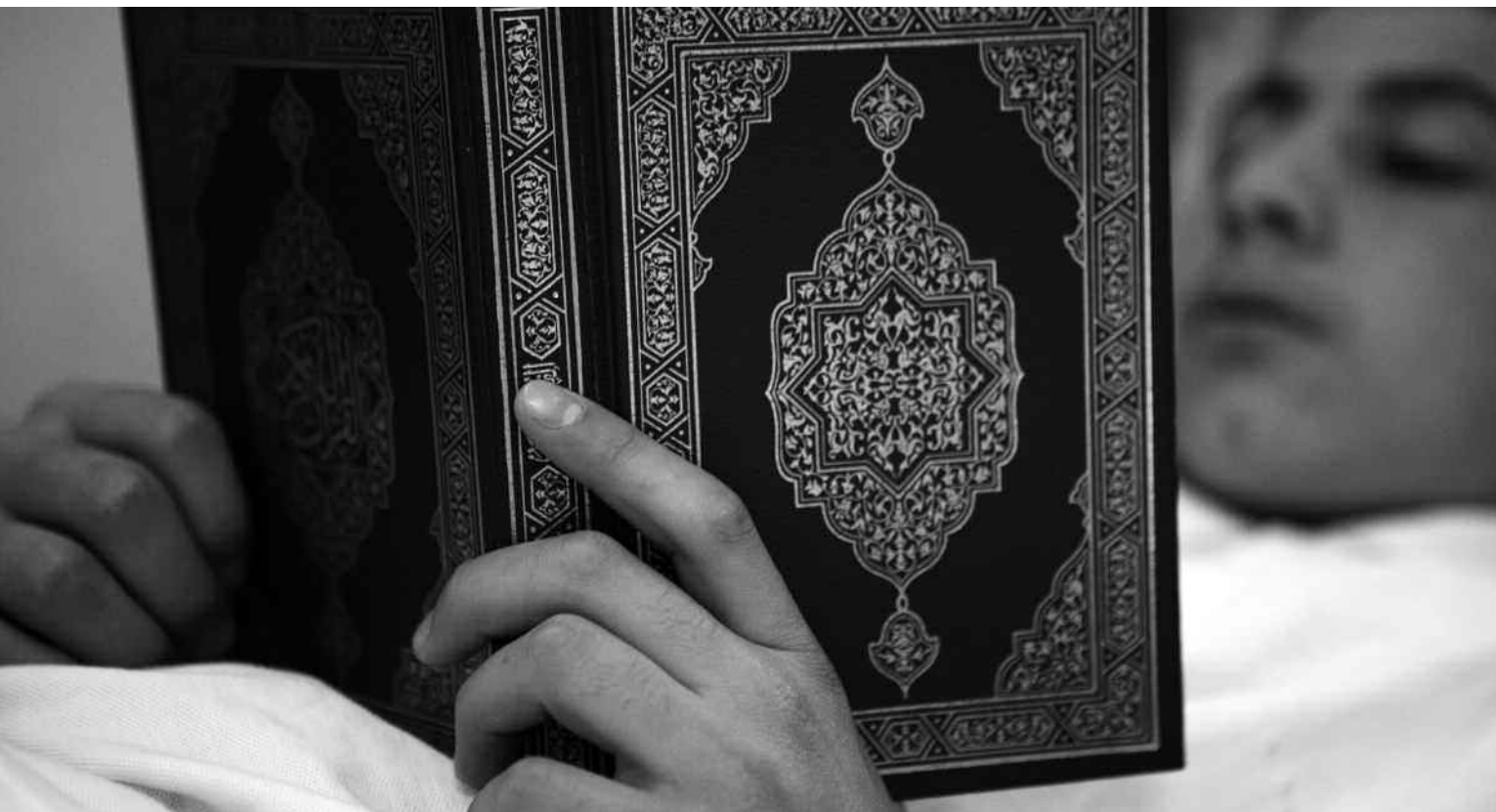
## Questions for reflection and discussion

- What opportunities are afforded during worship for stimulating individual and collective reflection on existing practices? Do these contradict religious and human rights principles? If so, what can be done to change them?
- How are girls and boys, children with different backgrounds and with differing abilities included in religious ceremonies and events? How might their experience of worship differ from adults? If it does differ, is this taken into consideration during communal worship?
- Does the manner in which worship and religious ceremonies are conducted demonstrate respect for children?

## Suggestions for action

- Plan religious services and events dedicated to children and non-violence; involve children in the process of planning and performing the service or event.
- During worship, religious festivals and events, use special prayers, readings and scriptural texts that promote respect for the child's physical, spiritual and emotional integrity.
- Take the opportunities of religious rites during children's life stages to provide parents with information and resources on key issues, such as education, nutrition and positive non-violent parenting.
- Offer support for new parents and grandparents, such as group support and discussions of positive discipline and non-violent parenting, among other health and wellness concerns.
- Hold a public vigil dedicated to children and non-violence. Remember children who have suffered as a result of violence.
- Ensure that the use of religious texts promotes positive non-violent discipline and does not condone violence against children. Encourage open discussion of texts that may be used to justify violence, and facilitate reflection and





dialogue about evolving thought in child rights and theology.

- Encourage theological reflection, and research special prayers and rituals already developed to deal with contemporary issues relating to violence.
- Write liturgies, prayers and readings that promote compassion towards children and non-violence.
- Include children's contributions regarding their needs during the leadership selection processes.

### **Nurturing the community with guidance and support**

Imams, ministers, clergy, rabbis, priests and other leaders of community worship are often called upon to offer guidance and counselling at different stages of family life. Violence in families is a problem that frequently comes to the attention of religious communities. Measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence must always include the protection of children in the family setting.

Leaders of worship have an important role in providing pastoral support and guidance for parents and in promoting non-violent relationships among all family members. Pastoral care can include space for healing and referrals for those who have been affected by violence. Special services of worship, with appropriate prayers and readings, can form an important part of the healing process for children – and for adults still suffering from the effects of childhood violence.

### **Questions for reflection and discussion**

- How are boys and girls valued and treated within the family? How do religious teachings promote these standards?
- What are the pastoral responsibilities towards children in the community?
- What support and positive parenting resources are available for parents?

## BOX 12. WORLD PRAYERS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

### Christian Protestant: A Parent's Prayer<sup>a</sup>

When I raise my hand to my children  
may it never be in anger;  
but to comfort, care and caress.

When I raise my voice to my children,  
may it never be in rage;  
but to praise, encourage and appreciate.

When I raise my eyes at my children,  
may it never be mockery or scorn;  
but with laughter, enjoyment and fun.

When I raise my heart in prayer to you,  
may I come as a parent,  
who treats my children as you treat yours;  
with love, justice and respect.

### Jewish blessing over children given on Friday evenings (*Shabbat*)<sup>b</sup>

May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe.  
(for sons)  
May G-d make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel  
and Leah. (for daughters)  
May G-d bless you and watch over you.  
May G-d shine His face toward you and  
show you favour.  
May G-d be favourably disposed toward you  
and grant you peace.

### Muslim Hadiths regarding children<sup>c</sup>

"Nothing a parent may award his (or her) child is  
better than a good upbringing." (Al-Tirmidhi,  
Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah 4.338, Hadith 1952)

"May Allah have mercy on a parent who helps his  
child be grateful and kind to him." (Ibn Abu  
Shaybah, Al-Musannaf, Kitab al-Adab, 6/101)

"It is a grave sin for one to neglect a person whom  
he is responsible for sustaining." (Abu Dawud,  
Kitab al-Zakat, 2/136, Hadith 1692)

"He is not one of us who shows no mercy to our  
young." (Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab al-birr 4/322,  
Hadith 1921)

"Fear Allah and be fair to your children." (Muslim,  
Sahih, Kitab al-Hibat 3/1242-1243)

### Sikh scriptural references to children<sup>d</sup>

Apne balak ap rakhian parbarahm gurdev. "The  
Supreme God, through the Divine Guru, protects  
and preserves God's children." (Siri Guru Granth  
Sahib, p. 819)

Pale balak vag de kai ap kar. "God cherishes all  
children, and reaches out with God's hand."  
(Siri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 957)

### Abdu'l-bahá, Baha'i prayers

O God! Educate these children.

These children are the plants of Thine orchard,  
the flowers of Thy meadow,  
the roses of Thy garden.

Let Thy rain fall upon them;  
let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with  
Thy love.

Let Thy breeze refresh them in order  
that they may be trained, grow and develop,  
and appear in the utmost beauty.

Thou art the Giver.

Thou art the Compassionate.

### Catholic Prayers: Prayer of Parents for their Children

O Lord, omnipotent Father, we give you thanks  
for having given us children. They are our joy, and  
we accept with serenity the worries, fears and  
labours, which bring us pain. Help us to love them  
sincerely. Through us you gave life to them; from  
eternity you knew them and loved them. Give us  
the wisdom to guide them, patience to teach them,  
vigilance to accustom them to the good through  
our example.

Support our love so that we may receive them  
back when they have strayed and make them  
good. It is often so difficult to understand them, to  
be as they would want us to be, to help them go  
on their way. Grant that they may always see our  
home as a haven in their time of need. Teach us  
and help us, O good Father, through the merits of  
Jesus, your Son and our Lord.

Amen.

Sources: a. Rachel Matthews, as cited in Churches'  
Network for Non-Violence, *Resources for Worship:  
Respecting Children*, 2008, p. 7. b. Siddur, Jewish book  
of prayer. c. Al-Azhar University and UNICEF, *Children in  
Islam, Their Care, Upbringing and Protection*, 2005. d.  
Siri Guru Granth Sahib, original text in Gurmukhi, English  
translation by Dr. Tarunjit Butalia.

## Suggestions for action

- Collaborate with qualified people to provide the highest standard of spiritual and psychological support and guidance for children who have suffered from acts of violence.
- Develop support groups for parents where they can share their challenges and accomplishments and support each other in solving problems without resorting to violence.
- Promote positive, non-violent forms of parenting and conflict resolution education for future parents.
- Join in inter-faith and other efforts of the broader community to conduct special events, such as vigils, in honour of those affected by violence.

## COMMUNITY MOBILIZERS

Religious leaders often have civic duties and leadership responsibilities in the community, giving them authority to work with human rights organi-

zations and others to eliminate violence against children. They can also be involved in the prevention of violence through advocating for legal and social policy change and working with communities and families to challenge non-protective attitudes and behaviours towards children and promote respect for children's rights. Many religious communities also provide direct services to children and families in need, in collaboration with government service providers.

Given their insights into community attitudes and traditions, religious leaders are well-resourced to challenge – with sensitivity – harmful practices against children. They are in a position to facilitate discussion and influence policy in order to help people find solutions to prevent and combat violence against children in the contexts where it occurs.

Religious communities often have contact with families at different life stages, and are uniquely placed to initiate community-based programmes to





support children and families. These projects can involve the community in finding solutions for implementing change. Civic celebrations, some religious festivals and the International Day of the Child can provide opportunities to raise awareness about violence against children and to attract support for reform.

### Questions for reflection and discussion

- What is known about the nature and scale of violence against children in the community?
- How do the local laws, customs, religious values and traditions affect the protection of both girls and boys in all the community settings?
- Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence. What are the attitudes and values of the community towards children with disabilities?
- How is the language of children's human rights understood in the community?
- What are some of the priority needs of children in the community, and who is working to address them?

### BOX 13. ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN: EXAMPLES FROM IRAN AND KENYA

On World Children's Day 2007, Grand Ayatollah Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili spoke about violence against children: "When it comes to the problem [of violence against children] silence or denial will only worsen the situation. We need to admit to the bitter reality that violence against children does exist in houses, families, institutions and societies around the world. All means including the lofty instructions of God and the spiritual influence of religious leaders should be tapped in order to change the situation and eliminate violent behaviour against children."<sup>a</sup>

On the International Day of the Child, 16 June 2007, *Religions for Peace* Inter-Religious Council of Kenya condemned the rising incidents of sexual and other forms of violence against children. In a powerful statement, the Council called on all Kenyans to take action to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse, stating that acts of violence hamper children's growth and deny them the opportunity to develop into healthy and wholesome adults. The statement was signed by Nairobi Catholic Archbishop NdingiMwana A 'Nzeki, Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, Professor Abdulgafur El Busaidy of the Supreme Court of Kenya Muslims and Rashmin Chitnis of the Hindu Council.<sup>b</sup>

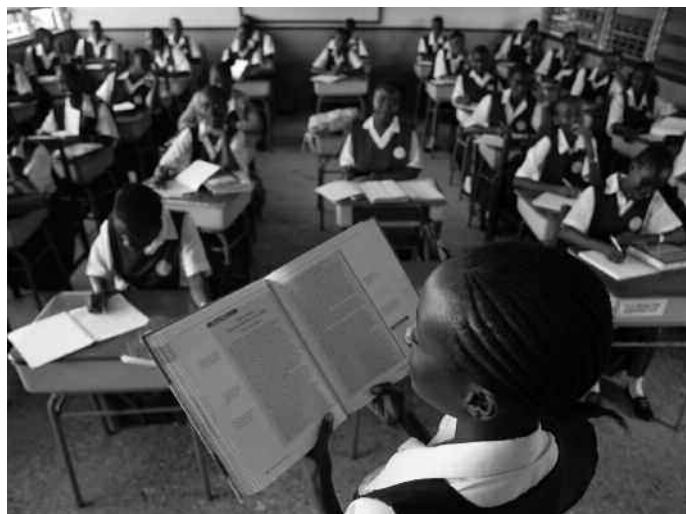
Sources: a. Grand Ayatollah Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili, 'A Message for World Children's Day Iran', 2007. b. Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, Statement, International Day of the Child, 2007.

### Suggestions for action

- Raise awareness of violence against children by educating the community about the forms of such violence, its consequences for children and the rights that children have.
- Build links with the community through existing networks, organizations and religious groups. Form or participate in an action group to identify and map out the risks to children in the local

community and to develop a plan of action to address the problem.

- Approach community organizations and offer to speak about the Violence Study and what needs to be done to respond to and prevent violence against children. Explain ways in which everyone can play a part.
- Plan a community event to bring people together and develop partnerships for working together to prevent and combat violence against children. Depending on the nature of the event, it could take place at a place of worship or a neutral venue. Involve children and adolescents in these activities.



#### **BOX 14: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE TO ELIMINATE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING IN ETHIOPIA**

In Afari society, nearly everyone is Muslim and group identity is based on clan affiliation or patrilineal line. A local NGO addressed issues including HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation/cutting by engaging the nomadic communities through community dialogue sessions led by facilitators who were respected members of the community.

Analysis of the experience indicated that the most influential information came from religious leaders who emphasized that Islam did not support female genital mutilation/cutting and that the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council had declared that the practice had no Islamic basis. This surprised many and generated lively discussions. Learning that Islam did not support the practice made it possible for community members to consider discontinuing it. For generations, female genital mutilation/cutting had been practiced as a religious obligation, so having religious leaders state publicly that Islam did not condone it gave community members the freedom to abandon the practice without the fear that they would be opposing their religious obligations. One participant said: "When our religious leaders rule to abandon, we follow." Many women asked: "Why have our religious leaders kept silent, as we suffered for so long?"

Furthermore, during community dialogue sessions and at different public gatherings, clan and religious leaders openly and clearly expressed their stance against the practice and urged their village members to abandon it. Each village, after thorough discussions, made the decision by a show of hands or by acclamation. Decision-making is by consensus, and to seal the pledges, religious leaders performed a prayer (*Du'a*).

Source: Dagne, Haile Gabriel, *Ethiopia: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Dynamics of Abandonment of Harmful Practices in Four Locations*, Special Series on Social Norms and Harmful Practices, Innocenti Working Paper No. 2009-07, Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2009.



# 7

## ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

None of us can address this problem alone. It requires partnerships, solidarity and building alliances. Even as our religions have much to offer, we are also open to learning more about the development and well-being of children from other sectors, so that we can each maximize our strengths. We are strongly committed to fostering effective mechanisms for inter-religious cooperation to more effectively combat violence against children.

– Kyoto Declaration, *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, 2006

The multidimensional nature of violence against children calls for a multifaceted approach. It is critical that people from all communities work together in order to ensure that the protection of children is at the centre of concern. Members of religious communities bring myriad strengths and assets to the efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against children, and by forging linkages with other key actors they broaden and enrich the network of involvement.

This section suggests questions and actions that can be utilized by religious leaders and groups to engage effectively with other key stakeholders working to prevent and respond to violence against children.

[The General Assembly] urges all States to exercise leadership to end all forms of violence against children and support advocacy in this regard at all levels, including at the local, national, regional and international levels, and by all sectors, especially by political, community and religious leaders, as well as the public and private sectors, the media and civil society.

– United Nations General Assembly, 2007<sup>12</sup>

Key stakeholders include:

- Government;
- Civil society;
- Inter-religious organizations;
- United Nations;
- Media; and
- Children.

## GOVERNMENT

Religious leaders are often in a position to take a prominent part in public debates, and to communicate and engage with the institutions of government at the local and national levels in order to advocate for public policy initiatives that promote

children's rights. At the national level, this can involve the highest levels of religious leadership influencing legal reform aimed at full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, monitoring and reporting of child rights violations, as well as following up on the recommendations of the Violence Study.

At the local level, leaders and members of religious communities may work with officials to influence local and municipal policies and laws regarding violence against children. As many religious communities also provide direct services to children and families in need, their collaboration with government service providers also strengthens the referral networks for children at risk of or exposed to violence.

## Questions for reflection and discussion

- How does the government follow up the recommendations of the Violence Study? How does the State respond to the Violence Study recommendation to prohibit all violence against children?
- Does the government have a children's commissioner or ombudsperson? If not, are there plans to appoint a person to advocate for children? What are the mechanisms in place for the government to take into account the views of children?



<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-second session, Third Committee, Agenda item 66(a), 'Promotion and protection of the rights of children', A/C.3/L.24/Rev.1, 16 November 2007.



- What is the government mechanism for reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child? Do religious communities contribute to the reporting process? If not, how could they contribute to the process?
- Are there other pertinent conventions or legislation that, in addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, influence national child rights policy (e.g., regional human rights treaties such as 'The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child')?
- At the local level, what are the relevant authorities charged with the protection of children's rights? In addition to governmental bodies, what existing non-governmental groups and fora would benefit from the participation of religious leaders?

### Suggestions for action

- Inquire as to what actions are being taken by the government in response to the Violence Study's global imperative to prevent and eliminate violence against children. Where action towards law reform has been taken, ask what plans there are for public education connected with the reforms and budget allocated for its implementation.
- Collaborate with human rights, social welfare and other organizations in order to urge the government to conduct a full review of the State's legislation and to identify what is needed to prohibit all forms of violence against children.
- Initiate or join lobbying efforts aimed at implementing commitments made towards preventing and responding to violence against children.
- Join governmental or non-governmental efforts to participate in the preparation of reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as dissemination of the recommendations of the Committee.
- Form or join community-based monitoring groups to collect data on and monitor incidents of violence and other rights violations to assist the authorities charged with these responsibilities.

- Support educational opportunities for children and young people to learn how governments work and how they can contribute to positive legislative reforms.

### CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society refers to the broad collection of private, voluntary organizations, informal and formal, that exist outside of the government sphere. These represent the diversity of society and its values, agendas and actors, and as such are a key component in the fight for child rights. Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in giving voice to social groups that may be marginalized in the broader political realm, such as women and children. In virtually every context in the world, civil society has demonstrated its potential to affect social, political and economic change in support of children.

CSOs mandated to promote child rights and child protection focus their efforts on advocating for and serving the rights of children at all levels of society. They bring specialized knowledge and social and cultural legitimacy to protection efforts aimed at preventing and responding to violence against children. By engaging with relevant stakeholders to transform attitudes and behaviours, they play a unique and critical role in reshaping the legal, social and economic environment for children.

Religious communities themselves are also members of civil society. Their ongoing influence in shaping values and behaviours can reinforce the messages that child rights organizations bring to community work. Their structures and mechanisms for communication and mobilization allow for interventions that are more timely and organic than "outside" organizations could establish.

Partnerships between religious communities and child rights and protection organizations can effectively tap into the dynamic potential of civil society to prevent and respond to violence against children.

## Suggestions for action

- Contact child rights and child protection organizations to discuss partnering on public events addressing human and child rights issues, advocacy and fund-raising or other activities.
- Invite leaders from child rights organizations to speak at public events in your religious community on topics related to children's rights, violence against children and community involvement in prevention and response.

### BOX 15. RELIGIONS FOR PEACE

*Religions for Peace*, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition, advances common action among the world's religious communities for peace. Working for the well-being of children and providing care and support for them, particularly the vulnerable ones, is among the action programmes led by *Religions for Peace*. Through a dynamic network that includes inter-religious councils, women's organizations and youth groups, *Religions for Peace* is facilitating cooperation across the globe to mobilize and expand religious communities' responses to provide care and support to children.

### BOX 16. INTER-RELIGIOUS CHILD PROTECTION COLLABORATION

The Global Network of Religions for Children is an inter-religious network exclusively devoted to child rights and other children's issues. Its membership and partners include a diverse group of religious leaders, religious organizations serving children, and development agencies. The Global Network of Religions for Children conducts region-wide and local programmes to improve children's lives in Africa, Central Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia. Current priorities for the Network include preventing and ending all forms of violence against children.

- Ensure strong representation of religious communities in child protection coordination fora and committees, including by assuming leadership roles.
- Collaborate with child rights organizations to adapt documentation on child rights in culturally appropriate ways for dissemination among religious communities.

## INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Concern for violence against children compels people of different religions to create a common platform for inter-religious cooperation. Such inter-religious collaborations, based on deeply held and widely shared values, can be more powerful than the efforts of individual religious groups acting alone due to the synergistic power of cooperation in strengthening the collective commitment to children.

Collaboration helps diverse religious communities align around common challenges and take advantage of their complementary strengths. It also positions them for partnerships with secular institutions without engaging those institutions in advancing particular sectarian beliefs.

## Suggestions for action

- Strengthen the capacity of multi-religious mechanisms, such as Inter-religious Councils, to address violence against children. Build on the existing strengths and experience of the group and share skills, training and resources.
- Ensure religious leaders and communities have access to the Violence Study.
- Conduct or participate in a survey of the types and levels of violence in the community.
- Express public concern about violence against children in the media and public policy discussions. Write joint letters to lawmakers and the press.
- Invite government officers to attend meetings in order to discuss plans to prevent and eliminate violence against children.

## BOX 17. INTER-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 2006, the Philippine Interfaith Network for Children was organized with assistance from UNICEF to bring together the different faith communities for the promotion of child rights and child protection. In that same year, almost 200 religious leaders of different faiths attended a major dialogue of the Mindanao Island group with a particular focus on child rights and the peace perspectives of non-state armed groups. The National Democratic Front, Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front participated in that dialogue, openly expressed their views on the protection of children and pledged their support to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is an international intra-governmental organization that was founded at the end of World War II with a commitment to maintaining international peace and security, promoting social progress and ensuring global human rights. The main UN organs are the General Assembly (which affords representation to the 192 Member States), the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. These, in addition to the 30 or so affiliated organizations that comprise the United Nations System address international law and justice, peacekeeping, environmental protection, energy and transportation regulation, emergency humanitarian assistance, global health and many other critical issues facing the world today.

As the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF is at the forefront of promoting and protecting children's rights throughout the world. UNICEF plays the leading role in the effort to eliminate violence against children, collaborating with other relevant UN System bodies, such as High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization.

The UN System, UNICEF included, increasingly relies on partnerships with NGOs and CSOs in achieving its goals at the international and country levels. CSOs participate in policy and programme development through conferences and consultations. They are also partners in programming and service provision within UN agencies' country programmes. Of the thousands of civil society organizations partnering with UNICEF, many are representative of religious communities.

## Suggestions for action

- Collaborate with or join religious, multi-religious and inter-religious organizations that are affiliated with UNICEF or other UN agencies working on issues related to violence against children.
- If there is a local UNICEF office, contact it to discuss joint advocacy, fundraising or other activities related to prevention of and response to violence against children.
- Invite speakers from UNICEF and other UN organizations to speak with the religious community on topics related to children's rights, violence against children and community involvement in prevention and response.
- Utilize UNICEF and other UN documentation and training materials for awareness raising. Work collaboratively with UNICEF to adapt documentation on child rights in culturally appropriate ways for dissemination within religious communities.



## BOX 18: UNICEF AND AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY PARTNER FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Al-Azhar University in Cairo and UNICEF first collaborated on a child rights information and advocacy tool in 1405 Hijrah (1985 AD), with the publication of *Child Care in Islam*. The subsequent 20 years saw enormous progress in the evolution of children's rights, with the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other global developments. Therefore, in the year 1425 Hijrah (2004 AD), UNICEF approached the International Islamic Centre for Demographic Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University to update the analysis of child rights in the context of Islam. Experts from the fields of theology, medical science, psychology, sociology and education were convened to draft a document that was then discussed by international experts. The document addressed four major themes – child rights, child health, child protection and child education – from the perspective of practitioners in the various fields, then examined these in the context of Shari'a and supported them by verses from the Holy Koran, with Hadiths from the Prophetic Tradition.

The resulting publication, *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection*, is a tool for theologians and imams, child rights and welfare workers, health care providers, educators, policy makers and others involved in promoting and protecting the rights of children in the Muslim world.<sup>13</sup>

### MEDIA

Working with the media can be an effective tool for creating awareness, reporting abuses, disseminating information across a wide section of the community and creating broader support to prevent and respond to violence against children. Many religious communities own and operate various types of media outlets, and can be very important channels for religious communities to use in their advocacy and public information efforts.

Media reports should focus on the positive results of actions to address violence against children – not just the actual violations or the blame directed at perpetrators. This is especially important when addressing forms of violence that have a degree of social acceptance in the community.

### Suggestions for action

- Compile a local, national and religious media contact list that includes radio, television, print and Internet media in order to establish and promote constructive relationships.
- Explore creative ways to effectively use the media to influence government policy, inform the public about the issue and change public attitudes.
- Build relationships with journalists and feature writers, and offer expertise to comment on relevant topics and news items.
- Identify the procedures for getting event information into newspapers, calendars and other listings. Invite the media to cover or co-sponsor events and religious services.
- Draw attention to the need for reform for children through open letters to the editor signed by religious leaders and prominent individuals.
- Write press releases, opinion features and editorial letters to the editor when something newsworthy happens to your work.
- Share Internet links, information databases and media contacts with other religious communities in order to extend the networks of information sharing.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Azhar University and UNICEF, *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection*, UNICEF, New York, 2005.

Children are the only true experts on what it is like to be a child. I call on you to consult with us before you make decisions that affect us. Remember that the times are changing. We are young in another way than you were. We live in a different world than you did. For that reason, you shall never assume that the challenges today are the same that you faced when you were a child. We have the competence you need. Our participation will benefit society, not only today, but also in our common future.

– Camilla, from Norway, in a speech at the follow-up to the UN Special Session on Children at the General Assembly in New York in December 2007<sup>14</sup>

## CHILDREN

Participation by children and adolescents can play a crucial role in furthering their protection from violence. Through their participation, girls and boys can highlight the violations they experience and take action to prevent and address the violence and abuse.

Children's participation builds upon their resilience and can help girls and boys in the recovery process. Participation also offers opportunities to strengthen the capacities of children and adolescents to better protect themselves, to address discrimination, and to access the means to improve their and other children's lives. In addition, taking into account the views of children and adolescents is important to ensuring that relevant policies, programmes and services are child-friendly, adequate and appropriate.

Religious communities are multi-generational and are in a unique position to promote the participation of children by listening to their views on violence and creating opportunities for them to



<sup>14</sup> Cited on the website of the Child Rights Information Network, <[www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)>, coverage of the Follow-up Event to the Special Session on Children, December 2007.



express their thoughts and ideas of solutions for preventing violence. Children's participation not only facilitates their healthy development, but also benefits the religious community as a whole.

A child's faith grows as the child grows. Adults who model faith and provide opportunities for children to participate positively in a faith community influence children's future involvement in worship, education, stewardship, and service to others. If we are to grow and nurture the church of the future, children must be primary participants.<sup>15</sup>

By promoting a partnership culture in settings where adults have usually been in positions of power in relation to children, the insights and experiences of children can play a major part in identifying solutions to problems of violence against children. This has special implications for very young children and children who have been marginalized or excluded from decision-making, such as children with disabilities and minority groups. This does not mean that children manage all decision-making, but that they are involved in a meaningful way and that their views are considered seriously.

Children's age and stage of development need to be considered together with their views, thus ensuring that children of all ages have the right to be heard and treated with respect. Different ways of communicating, including through play, art and other creative means, should be encouraged.

Parliaments, local governments and religious organizations are increasingly consulting with children and forming children's councils and reference panels. Children who participate and learn to exercise their rights can feel motivated to make further meaningful contributions to their social and political environments.

### **BOX 19. CHILD CLUB IN NEPAL RAISES AWARENESS**

The children of the Bhowani Child Club in Eastern Nepal, who meet at least once a month, are taking action to improve their lives by raising money from the local community and building a Child Club House. They also established a children's library there.

Through hosting discussions and putting on plays, the children have raised awareness about children's rights in their village. They brought various issues into the open, from school enrolment to the importance of birth registration, vaccination, child abuse, child marriage, child trafficking, and health and sanitation.

The children feel that their Child Club has brought about much local change. They have been able to express their own views and are increasingly recognized within the family and village as people with worthwhile opinions and suggestions.

<sup>15</sup> National Council of Churches USA, *The Church and Children: Vision and Goals for the 21st Century*, Policy Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 11 November 2004, p. 4, lines 133–136.

## Questions for reflection and discussion

- What actions are children taking to stop violence?
- What barriers to participation do children face in the religious community?
- What are some of the ways in which children can be meaningfully involved in strategies to address violence against children?
- What preparation and support do children need to participate?
- What training is available to adults in the religious community to facilitate children's meaningful participation?

## Suggestions for action

- Provide training to equip adults to work with children and young people in the religious organization in ways that respect children's age and development, as well as their safety and well-being.
- Ensure all adults working with children undergo child protection screening, training and supervision.
- Initiate and support discussion in religious schools, community organizations and youth groups about ending violence against children. Promote the material produced for young people about the Violence Study.
- Support initiatives for children to become fully conversant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and raise adults' awareness and understanding of the Convention.



- Provide space for children to develop their own ideas and activities to address violence against children.
- Make provisions for listening to the experiences, views and recommendations of children who are or have been involved in the care of the child protection and/or justice systems.





# 8

## CONCLUSION

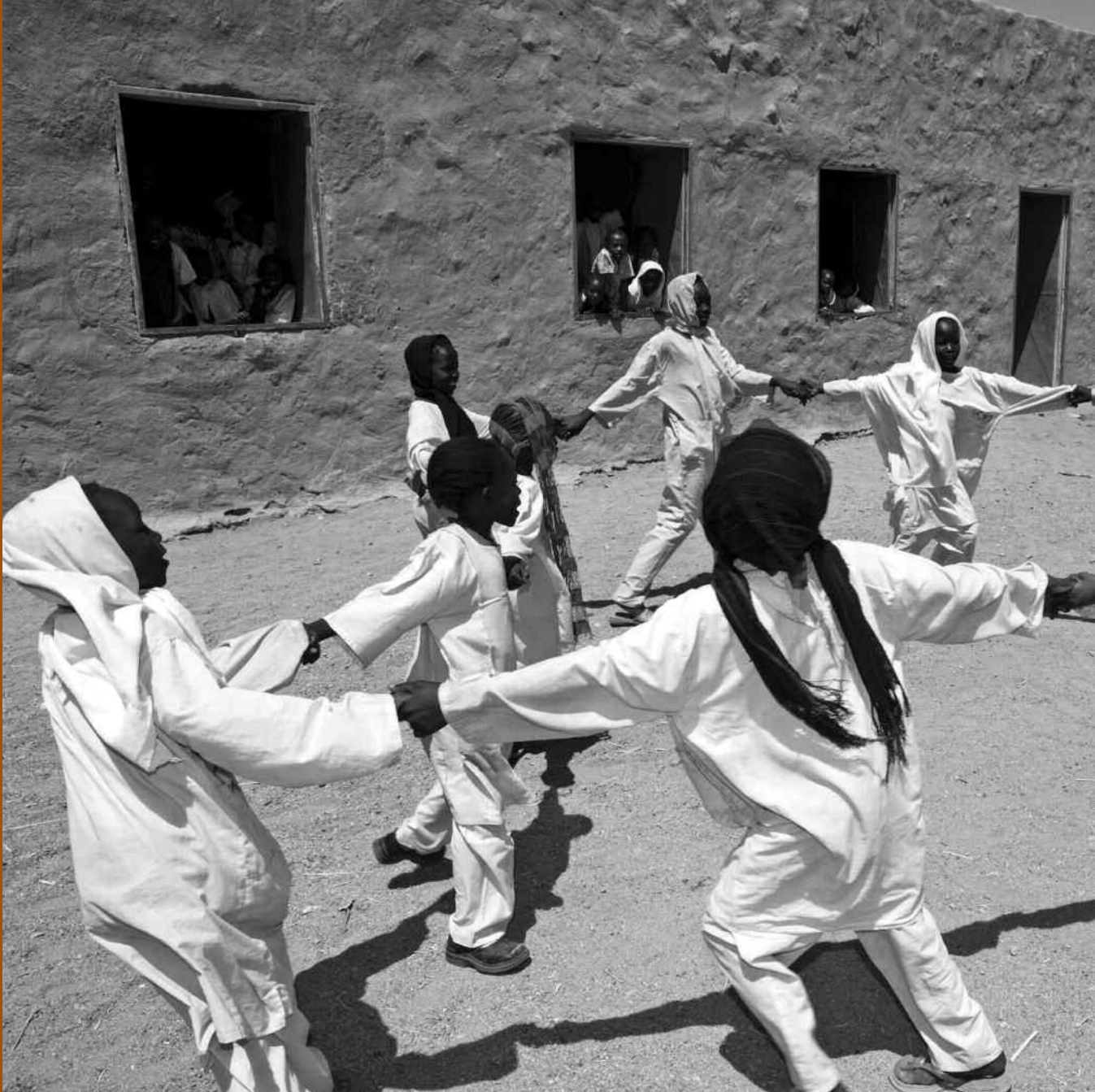
Each of us must learn to work not just for oneself, one's own family or one's own nation, but also for the benefit of all humankind, including children. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best guarantee for human rights and for world peace.

– His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in 'A message for the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children Global Report 2007'

Violence against children is an unacceptable reality, despite its almost universal rejection by the world's legal, philosophical and spiritual persuasions. The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children is a clarion call for concerted and collaborative efforts to follow through on the promise of protection made by the Convention on the Rights of the Child 20 years ago.

As the sources, forms and impacts of violence are diverse, so must be the approaches to its elimination. Collective action is crucial to effectively prevent and eliminate all violence against children. While governments have the primary responsibility in implementing the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, engagement and support of civil society and other actors at international, regional and national levels is crucial. Religious communities play a fundamental role in supporting dialogue on how to end violence against children, and in this way, their involvement greatly enhances efforts to promote children's rights and eliminate violence against them.

The Kyoto Declaration is a powerful step in laying the foundation of collaborative effort by religious communities to address violence against children. This guide was designed to offer some practical steps for religious communities to continue the dialogue and partnerships required to achieve the ultimate aim of preventing and eliminating all violence against children.



# 9

## KEY RESOURCES

### CHILD RIGHTS AND CHILD PROTECTION

#### Documents

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United Nations General Assembly, 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', Resolution 44/25, 20 November 1989. <<http://www.unicef.org/crc>>

#### Online Resources

Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), <<http://www.savethechildren.net/arc>>

ARC is an inter-agency initiative established by UNHCR and the International Save the Children Alliance in 1997 and later joined by UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Rescue Committee and Terre des Hommes. ARC provides a flexible resource of materials for training and broader capacity building activities. By engaging staff in identifying and addressing critical issues affecting children and encouraging dialogue, including with children themselves, the programme aims to be a catalyst for effective prevention and response activities. Training materials to download include a Facilitator Module focused on adult learning techniques.

Better Care Network (BCN), <<http://www.crin.org/bcn>>

BCN facilitates active information exchange and collaboration on the issues of child abandonment, alternatives to and standards for institutional care, and family unification. The network also advocates for technically sound policy and programmatic action on global, regional and national levels.

Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), <<http://www.crin.org>>

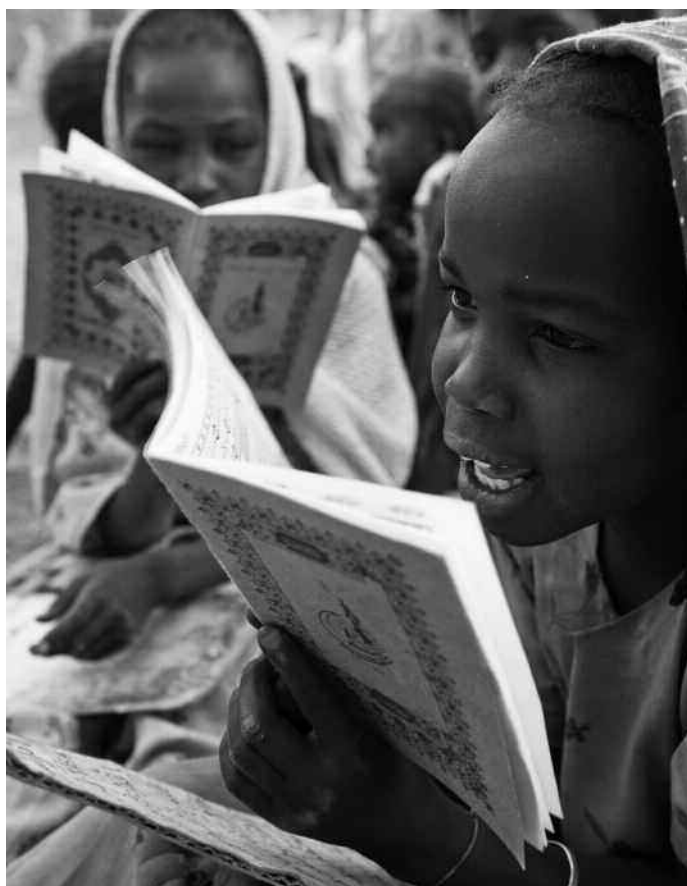
CRIN is a global network coordinating information and promoting action on child rights.

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, <<http://www.crin.org/NGOGroupforCRC/index.asp>>

This coalition of over 50 international NGOs includes many religiously affiliated groups that work together to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF, <<http://www.unicef.org>>

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse, and AIDS.



## RELIGION AND CHILDREN

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## Online Resources

Arigatou International, <[www.arigatou.ch/en/arigatougeneva/aboutus.html](http://www.arigatou.ch/en/arigatougeneva/aboutus.html)>

This NGO works for the empowerment of children and youth and the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child in Law, Religion and Society Program, Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Emory University, <[cslr.law.emory.edu/research/the-child-in-law-religion-and-society](http://cslr.law.emory.edu/research/the-child-in-law-religion-and-society)>

The programme is an interdisciplinary exploration of children, with a focus on birth, naming and growth; children's rights and rites; education and formation; child abuse, poverty and homelessness; juvenile delinquency, violence, public policy responses and reforms.

Churches' Network for Non-Violence (CNNV), <[www.churchesfornon-violence.org](http://www.churchesfornon-violence.org)>

CNNV is a network of support, information and practical resources to assist people in churches and communities to promote positive, non-violent discipline. The website offers publications and resources to download. Link for multi-religious organizations: <[www.churchesfornon-violence.org/links.html](http://www.churchesfornon-violence.org/links.html)>

Global Network of Religions for Children, <[www.gnrc.net/en](http://www.gnrc.net/en)>

This network is the only worldwide interfaith organization exclusively devoted to working for child rights and other children's issues.

*Religions for Peace*, <[www.wcrp.org](http://www.wcrp.org)>

*Religions for Peace* is the largest global coalition of representatives of the world's great religions, dedicated to stopping war, ending poverty and protecting the earth.

United Religions Initiative, <[www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)>

This global community is committed to promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation and to ending religiously motivated violence. The site has links to websites for Children and Youth.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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### Online Resources

Classroom Management Online, <[www.classroommanagementonline.com/index.html](http://www.classroommanagementonline.com/index.html)>

This website offers an online confidential distance learning course and professional seminar, or individual tutorial on classroom management and the preventing and handling of classroom disruptive behaviour in K-12 and college classes. Also available is a book/DVD on preventing classroom discipline problems.

Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, <[www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)>

The Initiative offers links to research, legal reform and other resources. Link to positive discipline resources: <[www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html)>

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN), <[www.ispcan.org](http://www.ispcan.org)>

IPSCAN is the only multidisciplinary international organization that brings together a worldwide cross-section of committed professionals to work towards the prevention and treatment of child abuse, neglect and exploitation globally by increasing public awareness of all forms of violence against children, developing activities to prevent such violence and promoting the rights of children in all regions of the world.

The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, <[www.unviolencestudy.org](http://www.unviolencestudy.org)>

Website for the Violence Study contains background documents, the official report presented to the General Assembly, the World Report on Violence against Children containing additional details and recommendations from the Study, and related materials.







# A

## **ANNEX. THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

The 2006 United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children is the first global study to provide a detailed view of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children.

The Study Report sets out clear recommendations for action to prevent and respond to violence against children. The Independent Expert, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, was appointed by then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to lead the Study with the support of UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In 2004, a detailed questionnaire was sent to governments seeking information on their approaches to addressing violence against children. More than 130 countries responded. A number of regional, sub-regional and national consultations and expert thematic meetings were also organized and field visits made to develop inputs and recommendations for the Study. In addition, close to 300 individuals and organizations from all regions submitted relevant reports and documents. Many NGOs, researchers, journalists and human rights activists were involved in the Study and made significant contributions.

The Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasized that the study “should lead to the development of strategies aimed at effectively preventing and combating all forms of violence against children, outlining steps to be taken at the international level and by States to provide effective prevention, protection, intervention, treatment, recovery and reintegration” (A/56/488, annex).

The Overarching Recommendations of the Report on Violence against Children:

1. Strengthen national and local commitment and action;
2. Prohibit all violence against children;
3. Prioritize prevention;
4. Promote non-violent values and awareness-raising;
5. Enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children;
6. Provide recovery and social reintegration services;
7. Ensure participation of children;
8. Create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services;
9. Ensure accountability and end impunity;
10. Address the gender dimension of violence against children;
11. Develop and implement systematic national data collection and research; and
12. Strengthen international commitment.

During the Sixty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly (2007) a resolution was adopted requesting the Secretary-General to

appoint a Special Representative on Violence against Children, for a period of three years. The Special Representative was appointed in 2009 and has a mandate to:

- Act as a high-profile and independent global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children;
- Promote and support, in cooperation with Member States, the implementation of the study's recommendations;
- Identify and share good practices to prevent and respond to violence against children;
- Work closely and cooperate fully with relevant United Nations treaty bodies and mechanisms, and with the United Nations system;
- Establish a mutually supportive collaboration with civil society, including relevant NGOs and the private sector, and work to promote the increased involvement of children and young people in initiatives to prevent and respond to violence against children; and
- Report annually to the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council and to ensure that this reporting contains relevant, accurate and objective information on violence against children.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-second session, Agenda item 66(a), 'Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on the Report of the Third Committee' (A/62/435, A/RES/62/141), 22 February 2008.

## Photographs

Cover/page III	UNICEF/NYHQ2006-0963/Noorani Sasha/Fotolia.com UNICEF/NYHQ2009-0227/Estey JULOR/Fotolia.com UNICEF/NYHQ2004-0711/Pirozzi Alexander Reitter/Fotolia.com UNICEF/NYHQ2005-0944/Haviv Paul Prescott/Fotolia.com UNICEF/NYHQ2003-0535/Pirozzi Erik DeGraaf/Fotolia.com
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Page 53	UNICEF/NYHQ2005-1639/Mohan
Page 55	UNICEF/NYHQ2004-0596/Davidov
Page 56	UNICEF/NYHQ2000-0983/Achinto

We find strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child's development.

– Kyoto Declaration, *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, 2006



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