



Arigatou International  
G N R C

**The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) Fourth Forum**  
**Ending Poverty, Enriching Children**  
***INSPIRE. ACT. CHANGE.***

**June 16 - 18, 2012**  
**Dar es Salaam,**  
**Tanzania**

**Background**

The Fourth<sup>1</sup> Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) will be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 16th – 18th June 2012. The Forum comes at a time when youth are leading non-violent transformations in various parts of Africa, demanding a better life, better governance and more access to opportunities. Fittingly, the Forum's theme — “Ending Poverty, Enriching Children: INSPIRE. ACT. CHANGE.” — will address these concerns largely resulting from poverty.

Two hundred and fifty (250) participants including representatives from different religious constituencies – Buddhists, Bahais, Christians, Hindus, Indigenous Traditions, Jews, Muslims, Shintoists and others – will gather together with representatives from the United Nations and its agencies, the African Union and other multi-lateral institutions, civil society organizations, government officials and children from around the world. They will address the challenge of poverty and its devastating consequences for children, not only in Africa but also around the world. Like previous GNRC Forums, interfaith cooperation among religious communities is expected to result in a unique new faith-based contribution to children's well-being. At the Fourth Forum, with the focus on poverty, the GNRC is expected to announce a global initiative to reduce child poverty. The Fourth Forum will be hosted by GNRC Africa, one of the major regional networks of the Global Network of Religions for Children.

The Forum will focus on three concrete areas perceived as main causes of poverty – corruption and poor governance, war and violence, and unequal distribution of resources. These challenges have conspired to cause a contrasting situation of unprecedented global economic growth in many parts of the world, while significant parts still remain in absolute poverty.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, children still suffer disproportionately from

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<sup>1</sup> GNRC holds a Forum every four years. Previous Forums include GNRC First Forum (Tokyo, Japan, 2000), GNRC Second Forum (Geneva, Switzerland, 2004) and GNRC Third Forum (Hiroshima, Japan, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Three years into the 2015 mark when the Millennium Development Goals are planned to have been achieved, statistics available on the extent of poverty are chilling. In the midst of unprecedented global growth – growth which has ensured a billionaire is created every 2<sup>nd</sup> day, growth that has propelled the global economy to top the 65 trillion USD mark, growth that has lifted over one billion persons out of absolute poverty in Asia alone in a matter of 50 years – about 1 billion people still live in absolute poverty and do not have access to clean water, 800 million of whom will most likely go to bed hungry, and another 2 billion lacking access to proper sanitation (Kul Gautam, GNRC Third Forum).

poverty, accounting for a large share of poverty statistics. Worse, this challenge is not just limited to the less developed nations, but is also found in the richest countries of the world where unprecedented prosperity has been registered. Children therefore must be at the centre in any effort or strategy to fight poverty.

For the first time in the history of the GNRC, the Forum will be held in Africa, and will be dedicated to addressing the critical theme of poverty. The Forum will commence on 16<sup>th</sup> June in honor of the hundreds of courageous children who on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976, and armed with nothing but their fragile bodies, were ruthlessly gunned down by the Apartheid Regime of South Africa for demanding better education and livelihoods speaking out against imposed poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The GNRC recognizes the enormous potential of diverse religions and faith traditions working together to fight poverty. Each religious community has assets that can be engaged in poverty eradication, and the spirit of inter-religious cooperation — which has always characterized the GNRC — provides a powerful set of capacities for fighting poverty. Taken collectively, religious social structures represent significant channels for communication and action, that if engaged and transformed, could enable believers and communities to function as powerful agents of change in eradicating poverty.

### **Resources in religions and faith communities**

A significant number of education and health institutions are established and run by faith-based or faith-inspired institutions. Three resources – spiritual, moral and social – of each religious community make this possible. And when mobilized, they not only inspire, but also effectively align tremendous energies and resources to bring forth notable impact on poverty eradication.

#### **1. Spiritual resources:**

At the heart of each religion is spirituality. Spirituality is the ‘dynamic process of a conscious and ever-evolving path that brings us in deeper touch with ourselves, with one another, [and] with diverse ecologies’. In cases of extreme poverty, our spirituality demands that we unconditionally give to, and care for the poor. Spiritual assets provide courage and strength to believers in the midst of tragedy and extreme suffering.

Spirituality provides what many would call ‘importance’ to the act of giving, of care, of physically nourishing human life, and of empathizing with one another. This asset provides human beings with capacities to feel the connectivity, the interaction and the alignment with all humanity.

#### **2. Moral resources:**

Religious and faith traditions have moral capacities that build upon and unfold the great strengths of their spiritualities. The moral assets of many religious traditions include, and go much beyond, the simple elaborations of a code of ethics. Fundamentally, all of our moral traditions ask us to judge others by the same standards as we would judge ourselves. These standards urge us to work for justice in a just way that rejects exploitation, corruption, and more unequal distribution of available resources that causes poverty.

More importantly, these standards have often provided concrete moral basis for agreements, consensus, and acceptance to address injustices in ways that empower societies, and to look ahead to work and live together. The faith-inspired and led Jubilee Initiative that sought to cancel all debts owed to the less industrialized countries, is one such successful initiative emanating from faith communities, and fuelled by the collective moral assets inherent in faith traditions.

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<sup>3</sup> In honor of the children who gave their lives to secure a brighter future for future generations, 16<sup>th</sup> June was in 1991 officially memorialized by the African Union (Formerly the Organization of African Unity) as the Day of the African Child. Thousands of children in the Soweto Slums of Johannesburg marched to demand for better education, better lives and above all, freedom. That fateful day, hundreds were killed – shot dead by the South African Apartheid Army for peacefully marching and asking for what they thought were their rights.

### 3. **Social resources:**

Religious communities have historical social networks that can be enormous assets in eradicating poverty. Community mosques, churches, temples, shrines are focal social structures located in virtually every village, district and city. These social organizations range from regularly and frequently concerned assemblies designed for worship and reflection to those specifically dedicated to educational, health, humanitarian or communication missions. Many faith-inspired organizations have been successful in addressing poverty.

#### **The gap**

How then can leading global, regional and national public institutions, including political bodies, development banks, economic and social organizations and others fail to adequately recognize the capacity of faith-based or faith-inspired institutions to contribute significantly to poverty eradication? How can these huge assets, found in every village, every corner of the world, where even governments do not reach, be aligned and be deployed to eradicate absolute poverty?

More importantly, how can enduring partnerships between faiths, and between secular development partners and faiths, be forged to eradicate absolute poverty? And concretely, how can we make children a central and integral element in all of our plans to eradicate absolute poverty? These are the critical questions which the GNRC, as a global interfaith network devoted to children's well-being, can bring uniquely to the table, both challenging and inspiring religious communities and all their partners to develop more effective joint interventions to end poverty and enrich children.

#### **Mobilizing spiritual, moral and social resources**

Through the Fourth Forum, the GNRC seeks — and with concrete outcomes — to *INSPIRE* all of us, people of faith and people of good will everywhere, to *ACT* to *CHANGE* the current trends of corruption and poor governance, war and violence, and unequal distribution of resources; without which better lives for all, and especially for future generations, can be achieved. The GNRC will seek to bring together and encourage the main actors in poverty eradication to join the faith and religious communities, to together review and begin to reformulate the current strategies that seem to have lifted fewer people than hoped out of absolute poverty, especially the children of the world.

The GNRC will seek to reflect on past efforts, together with the faith communities and the global and regional organizations, and create new inter-religious strategies to accelerate mobilization of urgently needed resources to meet the MDG targets, and focus on sustainable development practices. Aligning and deploying the critical spiritual, moral and social resources to eradicate poverty will be a critical focus for everyone at the Forum.

#### **Expected outcomes**

The Forum will revisit the promises and achievements made during the first, second and third GNRC Forums. The second forum theme was “Our Promise to Children,” revisiting the pledge of “Prayer and Practice for the Future of Children” made at the First Forum in 2000. At the Third Forum, “*Learning to Share*”, the religious leaders, joined by the United Nations and its agencies – UNICEF, UNESCO, and representatives from governments and other bodies, declared three ethical imperatives: the ethical imperative to ensure that no child lives in poverty; the ethical imperative to end violence against children; and the ethical imperative to protect the earth. At the Fourth Forum, the spotlight will be on poverty, and the ethical imperative that no child lives in poverty.

An *INSPIRED* group of actors, including the youth and children, willing to *ACT* to *CHANGE* the status-quo where poverty still reigns, where corruption and poor governance is a norm rather than the exception, and unequal distribution of wealth is still evident, is expected to be mobilized. Driven by GNRC's commitment to ensuring children's right to participate and be heard in all matters affecting them — as grounded in Article 12 of the CRC — and building on the GNRC's experience with empowering children and youth, the Fourth Forum will provide a unique opportunity for children and youth to:

- i. Bring up their needs and ideas for action through an engaging dialogue among themselves and with senior religious, political and social leaders
- ii. Demonstrate their commitment and capacity to lead in the implementation of GNRC's initiative on poverty together with adults
- iii. Further develop their knowledge and understanding of the world's key challenges, empowering them to become responsible global citizens
- iv. Be encouraged to participate in peer-to-peer education in their communities

It is expected that faith communities will show-case their contributions to eradicating poverty, propose ways to partner with development agencies, and call on governments, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies including the United Nations, the African Union, the World Economic Forum and others to join hands with them in fighting poverty.

A unique initiative on poverty, spearheaded by religious communities working together, is expected to be announced during the Forum, with contributions to this initiative coming from various partners, building on the hopes and yearning of children to transform their future. Consideration will be given to how to equip the next generation with the skills, knowledge and resources to constructively engage with their own political process to achieve change. Such an approach will foster a respect for a human development framework based on common a global ethic common to all religions.

Concrete steps and initiatives designed to eradicate poverty will be shared, and the possibility of scaling up existing successful practices will be studied and considered.

A passionate plea to the governments, development agencies, private business communities, and partners to scale-up efforts to eradicate poverty will be made by religious leaders in this Forum. Partners in addressing poverty, especially governments, will be called upon to honor previous promises made, and obligations agreed to under different agreements.

The religious leaders themselves are expected to make a pledge to engage their own faith communities more fully in the fight against child poverty, and to devote the vast spiritual, moral, and social resources of their traditions to the shared goal of lifting enriching and empowering the world's children.

Now is the time to implement more effective partnerships to eradicate poverty. The Fourth Forum will be a reminder – and a call to action – that children can no longer wait for years-on-end before solutions to end poverty are found and implemented. The courageous actions by the children on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976 in Soweto, Johannesburg, transformed the struggle for apartheid, and forever the course of the history of South Africa. So too, can we, with the children, transform this world in which poverty still reigns. The moment to act is Now. The time for action is Today.

“The Child’s Name is Today”

*We are guilty of many errors and faults,  
But our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life.  
Many things we need can wait,  
The Child cannot.  
Right now is the time bones are being formed,  
Blood is being made, senses are being developed.  
To the Child we cannot answer “Tomorrow,”  
The Child’s name is Today.  
(Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral)*