

Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children

Comprehensive Report

LEARNING TO SHARE
Values, Action, Hope

May 24-26, 2008

Hiroshima, Japan

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Arigatou Foundation

3-3-3 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku Tokyo, Japan 151-0053

TEL: +81-3-3370-5396

FAX: +81-3-3370-7749

Email: mail@arigatou-net.or.jp

www.gnrc.net

Layout and design:

Urban Connections

Yushin Bldg. Shinkan 12F, 3-27-11 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0002

TEL: 03-5467-4721

FAX: 03-5467-4722

www.urbanconnections.jp

Foreword



The Third Forum of the GNRC in Hiroshima brought together legions of “unreasonable people” from 63 countries who wanted to change the world through “prayer and practice” for our children. George Bernard Shaw once observed, “Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world, but unreasonable people question the status quo and seek change and progress. All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people.”

By that definition, the religious leaders, educators, NGO practitioners, senior officials from the UN and its agencies, youth and children from 63 countries who met in Hiroshima were all unreasonable people united in their determination to alleviate the suffering of children and ensure their full development.

The three-day forum, the third in the series since the inaugural forum of 2000, capped months of dedicated work by GNRC’s regional coordinators, members of the international organizing committee and the entire family of GNRC/Arigatou Foundation founded and led by the Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto.

Perhaps the spirit of the Forum was best captured by Nobel Peace laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel who addressed the opening. “It is essential to ‘make words walk,’ and to make thoughts walk... It is necessary that, from childhood, we begin to make words walk, in the family, in social relationships, in school. Many children suffer from domestic and social violence, marginalization and poverty. That is why we need the word that finds meaning in dialogue to achieve the respect that we owe each other, especially boys and girls in this world.”

The operative word that guided the entire deliberations was “ethics education” — to stop violence against children, to eradicate poverty and to empower children. In plenary and group sessions, the participants hammered out clear and specific action to translate words and thoughts into deed — that I believe was the greatest achievement of the Third Forum. Seen in that light, it was fitting for the participants to end the Forum with a call for “A Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World’s Religions.”

All told, Hiroshima clearly strengthened the GNRC’s important role in mobilizing people of different faiths at the global level working in partnership with UN and other international organizations and in frontline communities assisting the sick, the poor and the most vulnerable.

Samuel Koo
Ambassador for Cultural Cooperation, Republic of Korea
Chairman, GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee

Introduction



The Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) was held 24-26 May 2008 in Hiroshima, City of International Peace, under the main theme of *Learning to Share: Values, Action, Hope*. Over 350 participants from 63 countries, including 42 children, engaged in fruitful discussions on how to provide a meaningful future for children.

The members of the GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee, chaired by Ambassador Samuel Koo, offered tremendous assistance and guidance from the early stages of the preparations, ensuring the forum would be a success. It was also thanks to the devotion of the WCRP Japanese Committee, Rissho Kosei-Kai, and all the staff and volunteers, that we were able to have such an enriching three days together and achieve a wonderful outcome. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to everyone who made this forum such a significant gathering.

I am very grateful that, at the Forum, we were able to launch *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*, a tangible fulfillment of Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto's pledge to the United Nations General Assembly at the Special Session on Children in 2002 to promote ethics education for children. The Third Forum also produced a new initiative, the proposal to establish "A Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions," a single day each year where people around the world can join in prayer and action to make the world a better place for children. I earnestly hope this initiative will bring out the best in the GNRC's regional work.

In producing this report, we have endeavored to ensure that it reflects both the heartfelt commitment and the in-depth deliberations that characterized our time together in Hiroshima. I hope that readers will easily sense the wonderful spirit of solidarity and renewed resolve we shared at the Forum. Most of all, I hope this report will provide a firm foundation for implementing GNRC initiatives, reminding us of the Hiroshima Declaration and what we together promised the children of the world.

Keishi Miyamoto
Representative, Arigatou Foundation
Chairman of the Board, Myochikai

Organizer and Supporters of the GNRC Third Forum

Organizer

Arigatou Foundation

Partners and Supporters

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Hiroshima City

Japan Committee for UNICEF

Rissho Kosei-Kai

UNESCO

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World Conference of Religions for Peace Japanese Committee

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction.....	2
Organizer and Supporters of the GNRC Third Forum.....	3
GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee	5
Prospectus for the GNRC Third Forum	6
Themes of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children.....	7
Program of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children.....	8
GNRC Third Forum Pre-Meeting for Children	11
Comprehensive Summary of Proceedings	15
Outcome Document: The Hiroshima Declaration, Thematic Recommendations, Regional Reports and Action Priorities for 2008-2012.....	67
Appendix I: A Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions	95
Appendix II: List of Participants.....	98



GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee

Chairman

Hon. Samuel Koo (Korea)
Ambassador for Cultural Cooperation, Republic of Korea

Members

Ms. Liza Barrie (U.S.A.)
Chief, Civil Society Partnerships, UNICEF

Ms. Helene Gosselin (U.S.A.)
Director, UNESCO Office in New York

Ms. Meg Gardinier (U.S.A.)
Managing Director of Education and Community Partnerships, U.S. Fund for UNICEF

Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn (Uruguay)
International Consultant on Human Rights and Human Development

Dr. Mustafa Yusuf Ali (Kenya)
GNRC Coordinator for Africa
Secretary General, African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL)

Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne (Sri Lanka)
GNRC Coordinator for South Asia
Executive Director, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

Ms. Razia Ismail Abassi (India)
GNRC Coordinator for Central Asia and the Caucasus
International Convenor, Women's Coalition for Peace and Development with Dignity

Ms. Marta Palma (Switzerland)
GNRC Coordinator for Europe
Advisor of the World Council of Churches General Secretary on Children's Issues

Ms. Mercedes Roman (Ecuador)
GNRC Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Former Representative to the United Nations, Office for Global Concerns, Maryknoll

Rev. Dr. Qais Sadiq (Jordan)
GNRC Coordinator for Arab States
President, Ecumenical Studies Center

Ms. Dorit Shippin (Israel)
GNRC Coordinator for Israel
Coordinator, Doumia ~ Sakinah The Pluralistic Spiritual Center in Memory of Bruno Hussar

Prospectus for the GNRC Third Forum

*A Chance to Reconnect with the Original Spirit of the GNRC
and Share Hope for the Future*

The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) had its origins in the profound, heartfelt conviction of Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, President of the Arigatou Foundation, and Leader of Myochikai. Looking out at the enormous suffering of children around the world, he was simply compelled, as an ordinary person of faith, to take more responsibility for alleviating their plight. He issued a call for people of all religions to start working together earnestly — across all variety of differences — to build a better world for children. As the means to do this, he advocated the establishment of a global network to provide a venue for individuals or organizations working for the good of children to unite and cooperate with one another with the aim of realizing a world where children could grow up with hope, in health and freedom.

In response to this call, in May 2000, more than 300 religious leaders and grassroots workers from all major religious traditions and 33 countries gathered in Tokyo, joining in spiritual solidarity and a shared commitment to take concrete action for children.

Eight years has passed since then. The GNRC has developed rapidly, working closely with UN agencies. Some significant progress has been made. Six regional networks have been formed to address the various problems facing children in each world region, primarily focusing on the issues of poverty, violence, education and child rights. The Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children has been launched to fulfill the commitment that Rev. Miyamoto made on behalf of the GNRC in his speech to the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. All of these outcomes are the result of the new encounters, solidarity and cooperation that the GNRC has generated among religious people, UN agencies and others who are working for children around the world. We should be grateful for this progress. However, when we look at the current situation of children, we must recognize that we still face an enormous task. Too many children around the world are still suffering, too often and too much.

As organizer of the GNRC Third Forum, the Arigatou Foundation hopes to provide an opportunity for GNRC members to reflect on the GNRC's mission and to renew their commitment to creating a better world for children by strengthening and expanding this network of interfaith cooperation, building on all the achievements thus far. Another important goal, as part of this endeavor, is to forge closer partnerships with UNICEF, UNESCO, and other UN agencies and partners.

The main theme of the Forum, *Learning to Share: Values, Action, Hope*, reminds us to begin with humility at the Forum, as we renew our commitment to respecting one another and working together to build a world of sharing. Our focus in Hiroshima is on three major issues affecting children around the world: violence, poverty and destruction of the global environment. As people of faith, we share the desire to make unique, significant contributions on these issues, and one vehicle for this will certainly be the worldwide implementation of *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*, which we will accomplish in close cooperation with UN agencies and other partners.

Let us treasure every encounter we have in Hiroshima, with a heartfelt belief in all the shared potential that arises from our solidarity. Indeed, if we can truly “learn to share,” the new initiatives that emerge from our growing network will certainly bring new hope to children around the world.

24 May 2008
Arigatou Foundation

Themes of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children

LEARNING TO SHARE *Values, Action, Hope*

The Ethical Imperative to Ensure that No Child Lives in Poverty

- Promoting ethics education as a tool to eradicate poverty
- Drawing on religious teachings and heritages to address poverty
- Putting children first in human development

The Ethical Imperative to End Violence against Children

- Promoting ethics education to stop violence against children
- Mobilizing religious and spiritual communities to prevent violence against children
- Engaging decision-makers and civil society to build a culture of non-violence

The Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth

- Empowering children through ethics education to protect our planet
- Rallying faith communities to protect the environment

Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children Program

22-23 May **GNRC Third Forum Pre-Meeting for Children**

Saturday, 24 May (Day 1)

09:30-10:40 **Opening Session**

Video Presentation

Introduction by Opening Session Moderator

Hon. Samuel Koo, Chairman of the GNRC Third Forum Organizing
Committee and Ambassador for Cultural Cooperation, Korea

Opening Remarks by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto,

President of the Arigatou Foundation and Leader of Myochikai

Welcome Remarks by Hon. Tadatoshi Akiba,

Mayor of Hiroshima City

Special Presentation by Mr. Adolfo Perez Esquivel,

President, Servicio Paz y Justicia, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Message from the Holy See

H.E. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President, Pontifical Council for
Interreligious Dialogue (read by Rev. Father Pietro Sonoda, Consultor,
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue)

Presentation from GNRC Third Forum Pre-Meeting for Children

Remarks by Distinguished Guests:

- Hon. Yohei Kono, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan
- Hon. Yuzan Fujita, Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture
- Hon. Seyed Mohammad Ali Abtahi, President, Institute for Interreligious
Dialogue, former Vice President, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega, President, World Council of Churches
- Rev. Nichiko Niwano, President, Rissho Kosei-Kai

Performance by Ms. Sarah Jones, UNICEF Spokesperson on Violence against
Children

10:55-11:45 **Opening Session: Continued**

Launch of *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for
Ethics Education*

14:00-15:30 **Plenary I: Thematic Keynotes**

Introduction by Plenary Moderator

Ms. Helene Gosselin, UNESCO Representative

Scripture Reading by Children from Three Religious Traditions

Children's Presentation Addressing "Poverty" Theme

Speaker 1: "The Ethical Imperative to Ensure that No Child Lives in Poverty"

— Dr. Kul Gautam, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations
and former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

Children's Presentation Addressing "Violence" Theme

Speaker 2: "The Ethical Imperative to End Violence against Children"

— Dr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Rapporteur on Children's Rights, Inter-American
Commission on Human Rights, OAS, and former Independent Expert, *The
United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children*

Children's Presentation Addressing "Environment" Theme

Speaker 3: "The Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth"

— Ms. Henriette Rasmussen, Earth Charter Commissioner and former
Minister for Social Affairs, Greenland

16:00- 18:00

Thematic Group Sessions I

"Intergenerational Dialogues" — Panel Discussions with Thematic Experts, Religious Leaders and Young People in Each of the Three Thematic Groups

- Poverty
- Violence
- Environment

19:00-

Welcome Reception hosted by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, President of the Arigatou Foundation and Leader of Myochikai, and the GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee (Rihga Royal Hotel)

Sunday, 25 May (Day 2)

09:00-09:30

Plenary II

Scripture Reading by Children from Three Religious Traditions

Remarks

- Most Ven. Kojun Handa, Supreme Priest of the Tendai Buddhist Denomination (read by Ven. Koken Yamamoto, Executive Vice-President of Enryakuji Temple, Mt. Hiei)
- Rabbi Dr. Golan Ben-Chorin, Director of Congregational Learning, Temple Emeth

GNRC-UNICEF Joint Study, "Children in World Religions": Work in Progress—A Brief Presentation by UNICEF and GNRC

09:30-12:00

Thematic Group Sessions II

Discussion of sub-themes in each of three thematic areas by Thematic Groups

14:30-16:00

Thematic Group Sessions III

Adoption of Thematic Group recommendations

16:30-18:00

Regional Sessions I

Review of progress and planning of future initiatives by seven groups

Africa

- Moderator: Dr. Mustafa Ali

Arab States

- Moderator: Rev. Dr. Qais Sadiq

Central Asia and the Caucasus

- Moderator: Ms. Razia Ismail Abbasi

Europe

- Moderator: Ms. Marta Palma

Israel

- Moderator: Ms. Dorit Shippin

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Moderator: Ms. Mercedes Roman

South Asia

- Moderator: Dr. V.S. Ariyaratne

Monday, 26 May (Day 3)

09:00-12:30

Regional Sessions II

Development and adoption of action plans

Africa

Arab States

Central Asia and the Caucasus

Europe

Israel

Latin America and the Caribbean

South Asia

14:00-16:00

Special Session: Dialogue with Global Leaders

Remarks by Hon. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations

Remarks by Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF

Remarks by young persons selected by peers at the GNRC Third Forum Pre-Meeting for Children

Dialogue

Panelists:

- Ms. Anam Wasey (child)
- Mr. Isaac Lukumayi Peter (child)
- Ms. Rama Ndao Diouf, Special Advisor to H.E. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal
- Prof. Susumu Shimazono, Department of Religious Studies, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo
- Ven. Gijun Sugitani, former President, Tendai Buddhist Denomination
- Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General, World Conference of Religions for Peace

Moderator:

- Dr. Kul Gautam, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

16:30-17:00

Closing Session

Adoption of Outcome Document

Closing Remarks by Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, Representative of the Arigatou Foundation and Chairman of the Board of Myochikai

17:00-18:00

Interfaith Prayer for Peace

At the conclusion of the interfaith prayer ceremony, participants were invited to take a “Walking Pledge to Peace” to the Cenotaph for Atomic Bomb Victims to offer prayers for the victims and renew their individual commitments to peace.

GNRC Third Forum Pre-Meeting for Children 22-23 May

The participation of youth in building a peaceful future is vital to the efforts of the GNRC. For two days, around 40 GNRC youth representatives from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Middle East gathered to learn from one other and to get prepared for active participation in the GNRC Third Forum, while discussing and reflecting about poverty, environment and violence. The interaction among the young participants from various regions of the GNRC network, youth from Tokyo and students from the International School in Hiroshima provided a rich outcome as input to the Third Forum.

The participants discussed and elaborated on the theme of the Third Forum, *Learning to Share: Values, Action, Hope*, and practical activities allowed them to interact with each other as their sharing, reflections and discussions built an even greater awareness of global issues and local realities. The objective of the pre-meeting was to prepare the young participants of the Third Forum for an informed and active participation in the discussions and plenary sessions of the Forum, especially those related to the three sub-themes, violence, poverty and environment, by using the *Learning to Live Together* manual.

The youth presented their concerns and challenges to the Third Forum theme and sub-themes in artistic form at the opening ceremony of the Forum in calling for real commitments and actions to eradicating poverty, fighting violence against children and protecting the environment. In the thematic group discussions, the youth presented their concrete suggestions to each sub-theme and in the regional meetings they proposed concrete action plans.

As GNRC has consciously moved from working for children and youth to working with children and youth, the pre-meeting was organized to avoid tokenism and assure the active participation of the young participants in the GNRC Third Forum. As many GNRC children and youth have been participating in the testing of the ethics education manual, the pre-meeting was also an occasion to invite them to use the methodologies of the *Learning to Live Together* manual for a thematic application in preparation for their active participation in the Third Forum. Here are some of their reflections after the Forum.

Clara Mduma from Tanzania:

During the pre-meeting and the Forum I got knowledge about the ways to eradicate poverty and the role young people can play. I hope I will implement some activities back home, for example creating awareness through debates in my school and other schools nearby to make the government aware on how to break the circle of poverty by using education.

Ehab Wahhab from Jordan:

The pre-meeting was so useful for preparing us (the youth participants) and it helped us to become involved in the Forum. I noticed that there are many things about the world I didn't know. I enjoyed meeting other people, who are really interested to make better life for children. I learned that we have to work together to protect the environment which will be a disaster if destroyed, especially for children. I started now to feel about other problems more than I did, and now I feel that I have to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem.

Lilian Olson from the United States:

I learned that calling on people's faith to motivate them to take action against injustices such as poverty and violence can be an effective way of rallying people together. I heard many stories from around the world of projects being accomplished because people of faith came together to take action. I don't know if I honestly believed that people with dramatically different ideological beliefs could work hand in hand without the divisions proving larger than the goal that united them. If this conference, taught me anything, it taught me that change in a world of division is possible if our faith and our shared humanity is called on to unite us.

Nicolas Meslaoui from Belgium:

After the Third Forum in Hiroshima I was really motivated to do something concrete and I found the idea of creating a youth group very good. We invited children and made activities about diversity, solidarity, discrimination and the GNRC. At the beginning I was afraid of if the children wouldn't like the activities. What if they didn't react and get bored? But it went well.

Parallel to the pre-meeting for the young participants, the accompanying adults assembled for an introduction to the GNRC and the ethics education initiative. They were introduced to the *Learning to Live Together* manual, discussed and were guided in the responsibilities of being an accompanying person to a young participant. They also visited the Hiroshima sites and discussed how young people can be encouraged and supported to be peace builders.

Pre-Meeting Program

Thursday, 22 May (Day 1)

- 9.00 **OPENING**
Special Welcome by Rev. Keishi Miyamoto
Expectation and outcomes
- 9.30 **THIRD FORUM INFORMATION**
Third Forum theme and sub-themes
- 10.30 **GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER**
Who am I? Who are you?
- 11.00 **IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY**
Discover differences and similarities
- 12.00 **RESPECT ONE ANOTHER**
What happens in society when we fail to respect one another?
- 13.30 **VISITS TO HIROSHIMA SITES**
Visit to the Peace Memorial Park
Reflections about the Hiroshima tragedy
Dialogue with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel
- 19.00 **CULTURAL EVENING**
An evening of diversity and inter-cultural learning from different faiths and cultures with a special Japanese cultural presentation

Friday, 23 May (Day 2)

- 9.00 **WORKING GROUPS**
Work in three groups to reflect on: a) Violence, b) Social and economic inequalities and c) Environmental problems in various societies
- 11.00 **WORKING GROUPS**
Work in three groups to reflect on: a) Peaceful transformation of conflicts, b) Contributions to transform social and economic inequalities and c) Protecting the environment.
- 13.30 **WRAPPING UP OUTCOMES AND LEARNING**
Creative input to summarizing the outputs of the pre-meeting by making an artistic piece of work to be presented at the Opening of the Third Forum
- Preparation for the GNRC Third Forum



GNRC Third Forum

Comprehensive Summary of Proceedings

24-26 May 2008

Note: Texts in italics are verbatim transcripts.
Texts in regular font are summaries of interventions and events.

Saturday, 24 May (Day 1)

OPENING SESSION

The Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children was opened with a moment of silent prayer for peace and for the victims of Cyclone Nargis in the Union of Myanmar and the victims of the Great Sichuan Earthquake in the People's Republic of China.

Introduction by Opening Session Moderator

Hon. Samuel Koo, Chairman of the GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the organizers and participants of the event. He spoke of the significant progress that had been achieved since the convening of the last forum, which had been spearheaded by the volunteer efforts of seven GNRC coordinators in major world regions, while impressing upon the participants the urgency of the need to address the continuing plight of children trapped in a vicious spiral of poverty, environmental degradation, and violence. Against a backdrop of solidarity, he reaffirmed the commitment to bring the world's religions together to secure the rights and enhance the wellbeing of children

around the world. Toward this end, three major ethical imperatives were identified: ending violence against children, ensuring that no child lives in poverty, and empowering children to protect the earth.

Opening Remarks by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, President of the Arigatou Foundation and Leader of Myochikai

Welcome to the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for traveling many miles to be with us here in Hiroshima.

It has already been 8 years since we inaugurated the GNRC. Thanks to your efforts and those of many other GNRC members around the world, the dreams we shared in Tokyo in 2000 are starting to come to fruition.

Our interfaith cooperation initiatives have been making a difference for children in six major world regions. GNRC members are addressing issues like poverty and violence, and working to build peace and promote child rights. My sincere thanks go out to all of you, and to our many friends who could not make the trip to Hiroshima yet continue to work together for children and support the GNRC.





In closer partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO, the GNRC is beginning to make an impact on the global level, as well. Here at the Third Forum, we will introduce the first tangible product of our worldwide ethics education initiative: Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education. I earnestly hope that it will serve people around the world as an essential tool for fostering reconciliation and empowering children and young people to change our world, and ultimately, building world peace. I also welcome the progress of the GNRC-UNICEF study, “Children in World Religions,” and I would like to convey my appreciation for the dedication of all those who have brought about these remarkable achievements.

The Forum theme, “Learning to Share: Values, Action, Hope,” represents a significant departure from today’s world, so full of injustice, division, competition, and conflict. It is my hope to see every child growing up in a world lovingly shared by all living things—where all people, whether adults or children, actively support one another with compassion and a heart of prayer for others. I believe that it is our mission, as people of faith, to convey these values to children and to cooperate with one another to build such a world of sharing.

On August 1, 1964, I witnessed the original lighting ceremony of Hiroshima’s Flame of Peace, after Rev. Mitsu Miyamoto, founder of Myochikai, and I had been involved in the planning and preparation. We carried our own flame of peace from Myochikai headquarters in Tokyo all the way to Hiroshima, and saw it united with the Flame that day in one shared prayer for lasting world peace. It is my sincere hope that being here in Hiroshima, the site of unspeakable atomic horrors little more than half a century ago, and a place of constant prayer for lasting peace ever since, will provide us all with a significant opportunity to revisit the original spirit of the GNRC—“prayer and practice”—and to renew our commitment as people of faith to make even greater progress for the sake of all the world’s children.

May the blessings and wisdom of the Divine Presence be with you all.

Welcome Remarks by Hon. Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima City



I would like to offer my thoughts on the occasion of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC). First, on behalf of Hiroshima’s 1.16 million citizens, let me express my deep respect to all the people involved in the organization of this Forum, including the Arigatou Foundation, and extend my heartfelt welcome to all of you who came from all around the world.

The GNRC was launched in 2000 by the Arigatou Foundation, which called for people of faith from around the world to go beyond religious differences to work together for children, in the belief that building an environment where children of the world can grow up safe and sound is the mission of religious people.

The City of Hiroshima has been working to create a city in which the entire community supports the raising of children. The support policy for children and families was revised in 2005, encouraging families to have and nurture children in a sense of security. For providing the improved child-raising environment, “The New Child Development Plan of Hiroshima” was developed, guided by the principle of “children living their own lives with a smile.” Since last year, the City has been considering establishing an ordinance on the rights of the child, in keeping with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in order to realize a society where children can grow up in both spiritual and physical health and where their rights are valued.

It is indeed significant that the Third Forum of the GNRC, under the theme of “Learning to Share,” is taking place here in Hiroshima starting today.

Currently the world has various issues threatening peace such as oppression and infringement of human rights, famine, poverty, destruction of the environment,

terrorism and civil war, which are causing suffering to an enormous number of people including children. To build genuine peace, the human race as a whole must tackle not only these issues but also the abolition of nuclear weapons. I believe that the most important thing to create a common future for humankind is to value the spirit of "reconciliation," to reject violence, and to seek a path of peace in which all challenges can be resolved with reason and conscience.

Atomic bomb survivors, having experienced the atrocities of the atomic bomb and "the end of the world" themselves and upholding the strong faith that "we cannot let anyone else have the same experience!", continue to call for lasting world peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons in the spirit of "reconciliation." The City of Hiroshima believes that it has the responsibility to spread this philosophy and to generate a strong desire to abolish nuclear weapons. The City of Hiroshima is conducting a global campaign entitled "2020 Vision" that aims at the total abolition of nuclear weapons by the year 2020 in collaboration with NGOs, UN agencies, and "Mayors for Peace" from 2,226 member cities in 129 countries and regions.

This Forum, starting with a "Prayer for Peace," has as its purpose to consider the future of children and to create a world with children where people can share and support each other, which is indeed significant in leading to this spirit of "reconciliation." I hope this Forum will become a strong force enabling children to inherit a peaceful Earth. I also hope that the young people who are participating will resolve to work together with all people to tackle our problems and to ensure true peace.

Let me finish with my prayer for the success of this forum and health and happiness of all participating in it.

Special Presentation by Mr. Adolfo Perez Esquivel, President, Servicio Paz y Justicia, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



Peoples in their historical journey and in the everyday construction of life live the hope of building a better world. It is the search for "Earth without evil," the land of freedom about which the holy books speak to us.

Humanity throughout time has sought such a world, and in the twentieth century we had the hope of putting an end to the "cold war." We thought that the rich countries would cooperate with the poor and needy countries. But frustrations emerged with the growth of poverty and dependence, and the destruction of the environment. We are faced with a world that could solve the problems of hunger and poverty, and one that has demonstrated that powerful governments lack the political will to do so. They decided to invest their resources in generating wars and the arms race in many parts of the world, with high and low intensity conflicts.

Despite this panorama there are social forces emerging born of the cultural, social, spiritual, political and economic resistance of peoples that are building spaces, seeking to share bread and freedom as a power integrating values and shared memory in their identity. They understand the need for the redistribution of resources and meeting basic needs, and the right of every human being to dignity. They are bringing together efforts, ideas, and alternative proposals in achieving the right to self determination.

Within this journey is the challenge of developing the culture of solidarity which can allow for the construction of new paradigms of life, the participation of social sectors with their great richness and cultural diversity, and the strengthening of social and spiritual values that constitute identity and give meaning to life.

It is a matter of sharing the bread that nourishes the body with those who are without it.

Humanity lives today with many questions, but each of them has a face, the faces of men and women, children

and elderly people, and youth. They are concrete beings who question and interrogate us, who claim their right to a place in life.

The report of the UN agency FAO points out that every day more than 35,000 children in this world die of hunger. Walls of intolerance are raised again. I see in many countries, as I do in Latin America, boys and girls who live in the streets without a home, without the tender care of a family, without love and protection in their lives. Hope itself has been stolen from these children. We share with them and work with them to recover the meaning of life, and the social space to which they have a right as citizens. The Aldeas Jóvenes para la Paz centers are one clear witness to the fact that it is possible to change the situation.

We live in a world that could solve the hunger that affects millions of persons.

We must preserve and respect the Mother Earth who feeds us. Today we must put our will and our effort into the defense of the environment, of water and natural resources, as in protecting woodlands and maritime and terrestrial fauna. We must overcome the indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides, the contamination of the environment and the destruction of biodiversity that is wounding the life of peoples and of all humanity.

The work of God that was given to humanity is in grave danger. We must strive to achieve equilibrium within each of us, in our families, the community, with Mother Earth, the Cosmos and God.

When that harmony is broken, violence is unleashed against life and against God.

We find ourselves in Hiroshima, a city that I have visited several times. Each time that I return it is like re-living the encounter with the people who were victims of the atomic bomb dropped on this city and on Nagasaki. The conscience of the Japanese people and that of all humanity calls to us to struggle to build peace and unity between peoples. We do so out of the power of the spirit, of conscience and values, of the memory that persists in the mind and the heart of each and every one of us.

We know and we trust by the Grace of God that all is not lost. There are many signs of Hope and we must share that Hope, the power to generate spiritual life and the power of human dignity, transcendence, solidarity and awareness that calls on each woman and man to face the challenges of changing our societies in the face of an unjust system. For this we need a capacity for social, spiritual and political resistance. We need to return to the wellsprings and nourish ourselves with spiritual Bread that gives life and strength to our existence, that allows us to understand the deep meaning of religions, and the values of the spirit in their ecumenical dimension.

Paulo Freire used to say, "The opposite of love is not, as we often think, hatred, but rather the fear of loving; and the fear of loving is the fear of being free." If we are incapable of breaking the chains of slavery because of fear, we will continue being slaves. Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say that she had knowledge about one thing: "Putting Love into Action;" that is the great revolution of the Spirit and of Peace.

It is essential to "make words walk," and to make thoughts walk. There is no word without thought, and no thought without word. This is to free ourselves as men and women.

It is necessary that from childhood we begin to make words walk, in the family, in social relationships, in school. Many children suffer from domestic and social violence, marginalization and poverty. That is why we need the word that finds meaning in dialogue to achieve the respect that we owe each other, especially boys and girls in this world.

Spirituality leads us to communion with God and to the understanding that we find in every religious belief. Spirituality invites us to share Bread and Freedom, in other words the life of the great human family, as brothers and sisters; allows us to unite with one another in prayer, meditation, and dialogue in diversity and unity in order to understand the profound meaning of life.

There are people who have journeyed through life with their hands empty. Death lies in their forgetting themselves and the peoples. They have left no sign along the path. They have sown only amnesia where the seed did not flourish.

Children, based on their own understanding, together with their families and communities, need to be strengthened and grow like seeds of life and to be fruits of light and hope.

Humanity today needs to return to its wellsprings and to do so we need to create interior silence, to listen to the silence of God that speaks to each one of us. We live in chaos and violence that shakes the life of peoples; but these are also times of Hope, of finding in spirituality the meaning that animates our lives.

Cultural resistance leads us to fortify our "own thoughts," our values and identity, tenderness for life and the power of Loving. To understand that every person is born equal in dignity and with the same rights, that all peoples have the right to self-determination, and that the paths of Peace are the challenge to build a world for everyone.

The encounter between cultures and spirituality are signs of hope, roads that converge toward the same point in the unity and diversity between persons and peoples, and in the spiritual rediscovery of the great human family.

Receive a fraternal greeting of Peace and Wellbeing.

**Message from the Holy See
H.E. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran,
President, Pontifical Council for
Interreligious Dialogue (read by Rev.
Father Pietro Sonoda, Consultor, Pontifical
Council for Interreligious Dialogue)**

It is my joy to be able to send you this greeting, through our Consultor, Rev. Fr. Pietro Sonoda, OFM Conv., at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children.



This global network has an important task of reaching out to children, the smallest and most vulnerable, the future generation. They need to be defended, loved and valued. It is in the family that children are first nourished with that love and care which they in turn learn to show towards others. While every effort is made to provide children with food, shelter and education, the family too has to be supported, wherever possible. We cannot overlook the role of the parents. They must also be helped to accomplish their task of nurturing and educating the children. In circumstances where children are orphaned and/or are left alone to fend for themselves, organizations such as the GNRC can provide a healthy and safe environment where loving caregivers can impart to the young valuable lessons on authentic human and religious values that give true meaning to life.

I convey to you my best wishes and assure you of my prayers for a successful meeting and your endeavours with the children in different parts of the world. May God bless you!

**Presentation from GNRC Third Forum
Pre-Meeting for Children**



The Third Forum involved the participation of 42 young people from around the world who pledged their commitment to become agents of change in their local communities. At this point in the opening session, the youth participants delivered an artistic performance which depicted the plight of young children around the world facing poverty and violence. The children candidly portrayed realistic situations in both the developed and developing world, for instance, of children unable to attend school and facing uncertainties over their next meal. A doll was adopted as a symbol of the earth. As the doll's emblematic arms were removed, Earth's delicate balance was lost. In closing, the children called for intergenerational unity for the restoration of Earth's delicate equilibrium.

**Remarks by Hon. Yohei Kono, Speaker of
the House of Representatives of Japan**



I would like to express my heartfelt greetings to everyone here from the world of religion across the globe and leaders from many different religions who have travelled so far to be here.

Of the problems which we face in the modern world—violence, poverty, and environmental destruction—the

greatest victims of all are children. What is more, it is children who possess the greatest potential to change the way our world is. This is why I feel a sense of accord with the intention of Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, Leader of Myochikai and President of the Arigatou Foundation, when he called in 2000 for the convening of the Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, and I consider this to be an activity of the greatest importance.

I believe that the most important key to resolving the problems of the modern world lies in promoting dialogue between people in different positions. When I served as Minister for Foreign Affairs, something which I tried to bring into my job as a fundamental approach was to attempt to respond to the call from His Excellency Khatami, former president of Iran, for “intercultural dialogue.” Following this, with the outbreak of the simultaneous terror attacks on 11 September, the global atmosphere was for a while thrown into an atmosphere of turbulence in which “the call to engage in dialogue” threatened to disappear altogether. Now, however, the atmosphere is beginning to calm down in many ways, and I believe that we can start to work towards a return to normality.

The world faces many problems which are difficult to resolve. In April, former US President Jimmy Carter visited the Middle East where he held talks with the leader of Hamas. Although these talks in themselves did not lead to any particular results, I believe that even though there are those among the world’s leaders who still continue to speak and act in a way which “creates enemies,” dialogue such as that conducted by former President Carter is still of great significance. In this forum, likewise, dialogue takes place between people of many different religions, and I am convinced that the progress of such “dialogue” between people in different positions will in itself become a driving force for world peace in its truest sense. I hold high expectations for the results of this forum.

On this occasion, the forum is being held in Hiroshima, which on 6 August 1945 saw the first bombing using nuclear weapons in human history. The themes of this forum are “Violence,” “Poverty” and “Environment.” To me, the use of nuclear weapons is the most extreme form of violence, and the most extreme form of environmental destruction. As a Japanese person, I believe that it is the mission of humanity to communicate such experiences to the people of the world; as the Speaker of Japan’s House of Representatives, therefore, I made a proposal to hold the G8 Parliamentary Speakers Summit this year in Hiroshima. Let us all listen to the experiences of everyone gathered here today, and to those who were children in Hiroshima at that time.

I would like to conclude, therefore, by once again offering my prayers for the great success of this forum. Thank you very much.

Remarks by Hon. Yuzan Fujita, Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture



First, let me express my heartfelt congratulations on the holding of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) here in Hiroshima and extend a hearty welcome to all of you gathered from all around the world.

I would also like to express my deep respect to the members of the GNRC for tirelessly engaging in solving the problems that the children of the world are facing.

Currently, Hiroshima prefecture has launched a “campaign for the positive development of future generations” which advocates the involvement of every sector in the rearing of children, including communities, corporations and governments. We are actively working on providing physically and emotionally supportive environment in which parents can raise their children, thereby enhancing their nurturing of the next generation.

It is truly meaningful for people of faith around the globe to put aside their differences and come together to consider the main theme of “Learning to Share” and “what we should do to make the world a sharing and supportive place together with children.”

The people of Hiroshima have never given up their hope for peace. Their untiring efforts, warmly supported by people all over the world, have returned natural beauty and energy to a city that was devastated by the atomic bomb 63 years ago.

I hope the history and energy of Hiroshima help you engage in productive discussions on how to combat problems such as violence against children, regional conflicts, and poverty, which is one cause of violence.

Let me finish my remarks with a prayer for the realization of a world where all children can be safe and sound, as well as for the continued growth of the GNRC.

Remarks by Hon. Seyed Mohammad Ali Abtahi, President, Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, former Vice President, Islamic Republic of Iran

Children determine the fate of our planet and neglecting them would equal neglecting the earth, life, the future and hope. Children are human history and forgetting them would equal forgetting memories, history and innocence.

Therefore, the world of childhood is an amalgamation of hope and memories. Do the chaos and confusion of the current world not result in the disappearance of hope, discoloration of memories and negligence of the world of children?

Our world is on the verge of disappointment in man, for he has reneged on his commitment to his reminiscent past and has lost his hope for the future. However, the God of religions still has hope in man, for the birth of a child demonstrates that God has not lost His hope in man yet. Children have an amazing closeness to the divine world of the religions. Children's God is the most similar to the God of religions. The image of God that a child has in mind is not merely that of "a creator of the universe." Before a child identifies God with "creation" and "origination," he/she knows him as the tenderness of rain, the warmth of sunshine, the white of snow and the beautiful colors of tree leaves. Children's God is more real and more intimate. You can strike a deal, trade, fight or even argue with adults' God, whereas with children's God you can only chat, share wishes and wants, have mutual trust, and find peace in His arms. It seems as though there is a reverse relationship between spiritual maturity and physical maturity. Sacredness reverses the law of maturity. It was for this reason that the Christ impatiently wanted to keep away from his argumentative disciples so that he could join the children. He repeatedly said that anyone who does not accept God's sovereignty like a child will not find entrance into it. Similarly, Mohammad, the Prophet of Islam, let children ride on his shoulders so that he could smell heaven's breeze more clearly. In the dictionary of genuine religious thought, sacredness is not a waster of childhood but what perfects it.



The sin of ignoring the world of children should be registered in the record of leaders, politicians, decision-makers and protectors of religions. If we are interested in the fate of the planet; if we are waiting for a creative generation; if we want the expansion of hope in human life; if decrease of poverty and disappearance of violence are our ideals, we should unhesitatingly think of children's fate. What is children's share of political and religious leaders' decision-making? Is there no possibility of making laws that have children and their world as an axis? Is it not possible that with inspiration by the innocence and simplicity of the world of children, large-scale decisions be made which are full of justice, free of prejudice and based on equality? Political and religious leaders of the world should learn from children as much as they try to teach them. We should not forget that children have the closest similarity to philosophers in that they regard everything with awe and respect. In the same way that a philosopher considers all beings worthy of reflection and contemplation, children pay attention to everything; everything has an identity and is meaningful to them; they feel the weight of existence in all beings and finally consider themselves a part of them—not a separate entity.

We have always tried to teach children but now, it is about time we learnt from them and were inspired by them. If we are into politics, we should learn tolerance and equality from them. If we are into saving our planet and its environment, we should learn from children how to respect nature. Without doubt, we should integrate these lessons and inspirations into our decisions, policies, laws and actions and design our legal, political, educational, religious and international systems with hope and based on the axial importance of children.

I assume that we all agree with the Iranian poet who titled his book "I am afraid of a childless world." The world has never been free of the physical presence of children but we all verify that in today's world, the "metaphysical" concept of childhood does not have a

suitable place in our political, religious and social life. The absence of children from the world is equal to the absence of hope, future, creativity, religiousness and tolerance. Let us announce one more time that we are afraid of a childless world.

**Remarks by Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega,
President, World Council of Churches**



Greetings of behalf of the World Council of Churches, the Institution that I am chairing at present. Specially, receive fraternal greetings from Sam Kobia, our General Secretary.

We thank the invitation of the Arigatou Foundation and Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto to participate in this Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children.

In the UNICEF Report of the year 2007 (Progress for Children) they point out four fundamental priorities for childhood: promotion of a healthy life; quality education; working hard to overcome HIV/AIDS; and protection against aggression, exploitation and violence.

The question of childhood has always been a central focus of the WCC. As such, it has been tackled in many of its programs.

In the year 2001 we started the “Decade for Overcoming Violence.” In all the continents where this issue was dealt with, the churches and the civil society were called to overcome all forms of ill-treatment at home, in society, in the schools as well as in the churches. In Latin America, they even opened a school curriculum with the aim of educating children and of looking for non-violent solutions in their relations.

Education must be understood as one of the chief rights of childhood.

The other program the WCC has maintained for decades is the search for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

This program emphasizes that the abuse of working children and the questions of poverty and need, where children are the most vulnerable group, strengthen

or maximize the risk to their physical, intellectual, emotional, creative and psychological development.

Currently, when one of the main problems is hunger and the food crisis, children are the most affected group in the developing countries. We need to remember that every 5 seconds a child dies because of hunger in the world.

As communities of religious people, it is our responsibility to face the reality that today is affecting our societies, which is known as the “silent tsunami.”

At present climatic changes are sweeping away our children’s lives, so this must another concern to be included in our contextual analyses.

Children mean the present. If we do not educate them and take care of them in fulfillment of their current rights, they will have no future. There is a biblical text that expresses very clearly what God demands of us:

“Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord. Lift your hands toward God for the life of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.”

Lamentations 2:19

**Remarks by Rev. Nichiko Niwano,
President, Risho Kosei-Kai**

I would like to convey my heartfelt greetings at the opening ceremony of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC).

The GNRC, launched by the Arigatou Foundation of Myochikai, has grown to become the only global interreligious network that protects the wellbeing and the rights of children all around the globe, and it continues to convey a valuable message to the world. I would like to reiterate my deep respect for the GNRC’s focus on children and its continued efforts to find a solid path to secure their dignity.

Children are the key to the future. Tagore, the Indian poet and thinker, said “Every child born comes with a message that God has not yet despaired of humankind.” His belief in the purity and innocence of the child gives hope for tomorrow.

However, the realities facing children today are poverty, violence and a deteriorating environment. The purity and innocence of the child cannot but be affected by such grave situations.

There is a poem believed to be written by Bankei, a respected Japanese Buddhist priest: “A newborn child becomes wiser and wiser, but further from Buddha-hood. How very sad.”

This poem reflects sadness at children getting caught up in the secular values created by adults and growing away from the Buddha.



The GNRC takes this problem seriously and has developed and is today launching an Interfaith Program for Ethics Education for the children of the world. This program is a significant step in teaching our children and youth the importance of non-violence and the spirit of sharing in combating the root causes of the problems in today's world.

I deeply share the GNRC's eagerness, and its faith in children and their ability to become the protagonists of social change.

A society which defends the dignity of children is a society which also defends the dignity of adults. There is a saying, "The child is the father of the adult." Concerns about the present and the future of the children lead to questions about the ways of adults.

I hope that the three days of the Forum will deepen understanding for what the GNRC has achieved and lead to a world where every life is valued.

In closing, may the wisdom of participants from all walks of life bear fruit. Thank you.

Performance by Ms. Sarah Jones, UNICEF Spokesperson on Violence against Children



The award-winning actress, Ms. Sarah Jones, played the roles of three women of diverse faiths—an American Jewish woman, an Indian Hindu woman, and a Jordanian Muslim

woman. Her performance made it clear that, although the three women had undoubtedly followed unique spiritual paths, they shared a common belief in the security of religion, which was referred to as a “vast spiritual shelter.” All faiths are rooted in humanity and share a respect for the environment. Yet, undoubtedly, most religions have fallen short of their ideals at one time or another and in extreme cases, religions have been used to justify, incite and perpetuate violence and exclusion. At times the vast spiritual shelter has closed its doors to non-believers and endangered those inside. Human rights must be at the foundation of any religion and in this regard, the collaboration between the GNRC and UNICEF is particularly apt.

Poverty, environmental degradation, and violence against children are not just restricted, regional problems; they are global security issues. It is often the case that victims of childhood violence go on to become orchestrators and perpetrators of widespread violence. The urgency of these issues is clear: they are as compelling today as ever before because all violence against children is unacceptable and all violence against children is preventable.

Launch of *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*

Since the GNRC Second Forum, the members of the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children and its Committee have worked tirelessly to achieve a tangible outcome for the ethics education initiative.

A video was screened which told the story of Karen, a young person, instinctively wise beyond her years, and desperately in need of loving care. Karen is the protagonist in a world of material abundance and spiritual poverty.

The video went on to describe how religion is often overlooked in a secular society because people lack the tools for discussion, saying that *Learning to Live Together* is an invaluable asset for ethics education. The manual guides young people along a “reconciliation walk” lined with “kiosks” where participants are faced with an ethical dilemma, such as the failure to respect one another or a conflict. The journey ends with a kiosk called “Building Bridges of Trust.”

Ethics education has been a top priority for the GNRC since 2002. It is heralded as a foundation for the creation of a world of greater justice, peace, and dignity. Accordingly, *Learning to Live Together* was developed to allow children and young people to explore the ethical values of respect,

empathy, reconciliation, and responsibility. Its flexibility allows children of various nationalities and religious beliefs to discuss these values within the context of their everyday experiences.

The ethics education program provides the necessary tools to enable children to reach a common goal. It provides engaging role-playing activities through which children are empowered to make ethical decisions in their daily lives and fosters an appreciation of religious traditions and beliefs different from their own. A young participant stated, “I have learned to live together with people of different religions.”



Dr. Heidi Hadsell, President of Hartford Seminary, delivered remarks on behalf of the committee which produced the *Learning to Live Together* manual. Representing diverse religious backgrounds, the committee came together to discern how to draw on their specific faith traditions, values, and principles to fulfill their common responsibility toward children and the ethical challenges of a common and shared future. During this process, three profound commonalities came to light, namely the existence of shared basic values among diverse religions, the ability of religious traditions to serve as a bridge, and a sense of urgency for immediate, interfaith action.

Prof. Alicia Cabezudo of the School of Education, University of Rosario, Argentina, elaborated on the methodology of the ethics education toolkit. One of its advantages is that the toolkit can be used in both formal and informal educational settings—indoors, outdoors, at church, on the beach. Through experience-based learning children are equipped with the tools to relate the concepts to their daily lives. The toolkit also employs learning through exercise and physical activities to foster a sense of cooperation. Moreover, it provides problem-based and introspection-based learning. Children are presented with problems for which they must cooperate and engage in critical thinking to produce solutions with their peers.

Ms. Clara Mduma, a youth peace activist and founder of a peace club in Dar es Salaam, stated that prevention is better than a cure. This is the belief behind ethics education for children, which will provide them with skills for the peaceful resolution of conflict so that they may live in harmony together. There are more than 34 peace clubs in Tanzania using *Learning to Live Together*, and their united efforts will serve as a driving force of change in the world.

Dr. Vinu Aram, Director of Shanti Ashram, reflected on her childhood memories of a visit to Hiroshima where, as a young girl, she witnessed firsthand the consequences of the failure to coexist. World peace is an intergenerational endeavor, she said, which requires the solidarity and commitment of both leaders and children. The establishment of trust, particularly at a grassroots level, is paramount. To become true champions of children’s rights requires an intimate and painstaking examination into their world, in order to see reality through their eyes. And there must be a commitment to not only preach principles of tolerance, but to actually live such principles, and a vow to change the present and future together.

In South Asia, the *Learning to Live Together* toolkit was used as a framework for an ethics promotion campaign. Over 15,000 children came together, with the help of young facilitators. The theme of the Third Forum reaffirms that along with giving, there must be learning and sharing, which form the foundation for true transformation.

Mr. Andres Guerrero of UNICEF explained that in developing the toolkit, the committee was faced with several challenges: how can education help young people make ethical decisions in a manner that empowers rather than overwhelms them? How can children learn to regard conflict as something other than that which can only be solved by violence? And how can they be prepared to participate actively in matters that directly affect them in the communities where they live? Educational systems around the world require educators that can help children and young people acquire the knowledge and skills to understand global issues of development, peace, and justice, as well as develop a sense of global solidarity toward those who are struggling with the effects of poverty and conflict.

In addition, education is generally regarded as the key for development and peace. However, education can also be used as an instrument for indoctrination and discrimination. In situations of ethnic conflict,

education can be used to foster a culture of repression of minority groups, and to manipulate history and textbooks for political reasons. The *Learning to Live Together* publication contributes to improving the quality of education by offering an approach to learning that favors the promotion of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to bring about behavioral changes that can enable children and young people to prevent conflict and violence, to resolve conflict peacefully, and to create the conditions conducive to peace.

Ms. Helene Marie Gosselin of UNESCO remarked on the title of the toolkit—*Learning to Live Together*—which was inspired by the great thinker Jacques Delors who authored an influential worldwide study that today serves as the foundation for much of UNESCO’s work. Recognizing the great challenges ahead, Ms. Gosselin pledged UNESCO’s full support in ensuring the widespread use and adoption of the toolkit.

Overview of *Learning to Live Together* Ms. Agneta Ucko, Secretary General of the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children

The four specific values set forth in the *Learning to Live Together* manual were selected from among a number of important values deliberated by the committee. *Respect*—for human rights, for human dignity—was positioned above all, which was achieved through actions of *empathy*. Through the realization of respect, children are instilled with a sense of *responsibility* to respond to the needs of others. Ultimately, the culmination of these values results in *reconciliation*.

The toolkit is conceptualized as a village, divided into two modules. The first, *Understanding Self and Others*, addresses issues of identity and cultural/religious diversity. The second, *Transforming the World Together*, focuses on the peaceful resolution of conflict. Children embark on a journey of self-discovery where kiosks along the way provide valuable skills. Kiosks are a relevant concept of the manual as they represent a universally-recognized meeting place to reflect, share and engage in dialogue.

The learning log is an essential component of the toolkit which strengthens the process of self-reflection and allows the child to deepen their understanding of identity and diversity. The manual consists of seven sections: the user’s guide, the learning modules, progress monitoring, activities, resources such as traditional songs and stories, lessons learned on the development process of the manual,

and learning references. These concepts are all tied together under the umbrella of spirituality. The materials are currently available in English, Spanish, and French, with plans to translate the toolkit into Arabic, Japanese, Swahili, and Farsi.

PLENARY I: THEMATIC KEYNOTES

Plenary I began with three scripture readings from the religious traditions of Buddhism, Islam, and Baha’i, presented by young people.

Introduction by Ms. Helene Gosselin, UNESCO Representative



Next, Ms. Helene Gosselin, the plenary moderator, conveyed greetings from Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, emphasizing the importance of ethics education. She called attention to the significance of the three themes of the forum and invited the keynote speakers to share their expertise.

Children’s Presentation Addressing “Poverty” Theme



**Speaker 1: “The Ethical Imperative to Ensure that No Child Lives in Poverty”
— Dr. Kul Gautam, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF**

We live in the most prosperous of times in human history. Last year world economic output reached US\$60 trillion. And according to the Forbes magazine, the number of billionaires in the world reached 1,125.

These billionaires came not only from rich countries like the US, Germany and Japan, but from 56 different countries, including many low and middle-income nations such as Egypt and Nigeria in Africa; Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela in Latin America; China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand in Asia; and Russia, which now accounts for the second largest number of billionaires, only surpassed by the USA.

At this time of unprecedented global prosperity, in which someone new becomes a billionaire every 2nd day, we have the contrasting situation of nearly 1 billion people living on less than \$1 a day; 800 million people going to bed hungry every night; 1 billion people without access to clean drinking water, and 2 billion people without access to proper sanitation.

What an incredibly unequal and unjust world we live in!

Young children suffer disproportionately from poverty, not just in poor countries but even in the richest countries of the world. UNICEF has documented that the proportion of children living in poverty has actually risen in the majority of the world’s richest countries in the last decade.

Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that poverty is the greatest violation of human rights in the world today. And children are the greatest victims of this violation of human rights.

It is because of poverty that nearly 10 million children die every year from causes that are readily preventable. It is poverty that keeps 93 million children out of primary schools, the majority of them girls. It is poverty that lands millions of children in child labour, often in hazardous circumstances, when they should be going to school. It is poverty, debt and unemployment that lead desperate parents to even sell their vital organs like kidneys through unscrupulous middle-men to provide for their children. And when all else fails, parents are even forced to abandon their children, sell them to brothels, and work in slave-like conditions. Because children bear the heaviest burden of poverty, all efforts to combat poverty must give the highest priority to children.



But there is no single or simple way to attack poverty. Poverty, after all, is a cumulative phenomenon involving many factors.

While we generally measure poverty in terms of income in dollars and pounds, or euros and yens, and our own local currencies, the worst manifestations of poverty are found in the physical deprivation of children – the high rates of mortality and fertility, illiteracy and malnutrition, and a life without minimal human dignity.

Tackling these problems – starting with children – brings both immediate and long-term benefits in the fight against poverty. Healthy, well-nourished, educated children grow-up to become productive citizens, and they help break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. That is why our efforts to immunize the world’s children against diseases that kill or cripple youngsters are a direct contribution to poverty reduction. Our effort to expand access to safe drinking water and sanitation is an essential foundation for good health and improved productivity. Our struggle to pursue universal primary education of good quality is a sine qua non for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Now, some say that poverty has always been with us, and will never be completely eliminated. That may be true in the case of relative poverty, but in a \$60 trillion global economy, we simply cannot and should not accept the persistence of absolute poverty as the unavoidable fate of humanity.

While we rightly lament inadequate and uneven progress, and continuing poverty and injustice in the world, we must not forget that in a historical context, there has been unprecedented progress for children in recent decades.

My former boss and mentor, Jim Grant of UNICEF, used to say that there had been more progress for children in the last 50 years—during the 2nd half of the 20th century—than perhaps in the previous 500 years.

Consider these examples:

- *Over a billion people have been lifted out of poverty in Asia alone in the past half century. In China 400 million people were lifted up from absolute poverty in a single generation. India is rapidly following a similar trend. The Republic of Korea has seen its per capita income increase from \$100 to \$17,000 in our life time.*
- *Innovative schemes, such as micro-credit for women are benefitting millions of families and are having a very direct impact on the status of women and the well-being of children.*
- *Late last year UNICEF reported that for the first time since it started keeping records, annual number of child deaths decreased to below 10 million. This accounted for a 60 percent reduction in under-5 mortality rate since 1960. This is a remarkable testimony to the continuing progress in child survival and success of many health interventions.*
- *Smallpox which used to kill 5 million people a year in the 1950s was eradicated during our life time. Polio which used to cripple millions is on the brink of eradication. Deaths due to measles, one of the biggest killers of children, declined by 90 per cent in Africa in the last 7 years.*
- *There are more children in school today than ever before, and gender disparity is rapidly declining at the primary school level.*
- *Thanks to the heightened sensitivity created by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, issues such as child labour, trafficking and abuse of children, children in armed conflict and other violence against children are being systematically exposed, and action taken to address them.*
- *Many NGOs, faith-based organizations, and inter-faith groups like the GNRC, and civic leaders are championing the cause of children.*
- *Overall, children are much higher on the world's political agenda. Increasingly they figure prominently in election campaigns, parliamentary debates and national legislation.*
- *The fantastic communications capacity in the world today makes it possible to bring the blessings of science and technology to the doorsteps of even the poorest people in the most remote corners of the world. Child-oriented programmes are benefitting from this information and communications revolution.*

But much of this progress has bypassed the bottom billion people in the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. Civil wars and conflict, and the pandemic of HIV/AIDS have exacerbated the fight

against poverty by weakening the economies and social fabric of many countries in Africa. We all thought there would be an era of peace, and a huge peace dividend, following the end of the cold war. But regrettably, ethnic conflicts and tensions spread following the collapse of the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. Some of the progressive safety-nets of social protection found in the former socialist countries were dismantled as part of the "shock therapy" during these countries' economic transition. As a result children—and the elderly—are often worse off today than during the Soviet times in some of these countries. In many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the debt crisis, hyper-inflation, extreme inequality, and economic mismanagement has led to the deterioration in the situation of children. In the Middle East, continuing regional tensions, religious extremism, foreign occupation and intervention have made the situation of children extremely fragile and violence-prone. This oil-rich region has not been able to translate its vast wealth and resources into peace and poverty reduction. The recent dramatic rise in food and petroleum prices is bound to further impoverish the already poor, and as usual, children are likely to be its main victims. Soaring food prices hit poor households and the most vulnerable children and women the hardest.

When faced with grinding poverty and unemployment at home, many adults migrate to cities and faraway lands in search of jobs. Remittances by migrant workers have become the life-line for many families and countries. But migration is a mixed blessing. While it keeps many families and nations afloat from financial bankruptcy, it also leads to family separation, neglect of children, and weakening of the emotional bonds between parents and children, so crucial for child development.

Later in this thematic panel discussion, my colleagues Paulo Sergio Pinheiro and Henriette Rasmussen will speak about the ethical imperative to end violence against children, and the need to protect the earth.

As I am sure they will point out, poverty very directly exacerbates violence and environmental degradation.

Recently we have had violent food riots in Haiti, India, Nigeria, the Philippines and several other countries. As world food and fuel prices continue to rise, we can expect more such riots.

There tends to be higher incidence of domestic violence in impoverished families with unemployed adults. Many poor neighborhoods, with young people who can neither afford to go to school, nor find jobs, also tend to have higher rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, gang violence and other crimes that impact children.

Much can be done to reduce violence against children even in poor communities, as we will hear from Professor Pinheiro. But tackling poverty is one of the most sustainable ways to reduce violence against children.

The same thing can be said about environmental degradation. We all agree that environmental degradation caused by human activity leading to climate change is one of the greatest challenges of planetary proportions facing humanity today. But in an unequal world, the exhortation by environmentalists for conservation and preservation of nature may sound hollow to the poor who are struggling to eke out a meager living, while the well-to-do continue to squander natural resources to maintain their profligate living standards. A model of development that allows the rich to generously fill their swimming pools, water their golf courses, drive their gas-guzzling vehicles, but preaches to the poor not to cut trees to meet their essential needs for fuel or fodder is hypocritical and indefensible. What we need is a more balanced approach that puts greater responsibility on the well-to-do to moderate their consumption patterns and to support the legitimate human needs of the less fortunate.

As the Brundtland Commission on environment and development said over two decades ago, we must pursue a development approach that helps meet the needs of the present, without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs. So often, children are the forgotten victims of our failure to protect the environment, and to provide basic life-saving services to all of our fellow citizens. Each year, at least three million children under the age of five die due to environment-related diseases, including diarrhea, caused by inadequate and unsafe water, poor sanitation, and unsafe hygiene. This is the major environmental issue for the poor, as is the need to fetch water and fodder from long distances, and the lack of separate toilets for girls that prevents or discourages many of them from going or staying in schools.

As we deal with high profile environmental issues of global warming, industrial pollution, deforestation, and the need to preserve our planet's bio-diversity, let us not forget that effectively combating absolute poverty is the only way to make the poorest people of the world stakeholders in our great global crusade to protect the earth for our children.

As we can see, ending child poverty is not only a matter of fulfilling a child's human rights, and unleashing the development potential of our nations and the world, it is also of vital importance for ending violence against children, and protecting the earth for our children—the 3 key inter-related themes of this whole GNRC Forum.

All kinds of arguments have been made and justification provided to make ending child poverty a central priority for human development. These range from the high economic rate of return to human rights arguments. Yet collectively, we seem to have failed to make a sufficiently persuasive case to put children at the heart of the poverty reduction agenda.

As in so many other cases, when all else fails, people turn to religion and spirituality, the time has come for us to invoke and harness the power and influence of religions in support of ending child poverty.

And as the world's only inter-faith organization that is exclusively dedicated to enhancing the rights and well-being of children, we at GNRC should articulate why we have an ethical imperative to ensure that no child lives in poverty.

Now, there are many kinds and dimensions of poverty. As we have discussed, poverty manifests itself in the lack of income and gainful employment. Poverty is also reflected in the lack of basic social services. And poverty shows up in the form of disempowerment and disenfranchisement of people.

But most importantly for our Forum today, the world is also faced with the poverty of faith and spirituality, on the one hand, and the unresponsiveness of the world's religions to the challenges of poverty, on the other hand.

Let me illustrate this point with a real example. I served as UNICEF Representative in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, in the 1980s. I recall there was an enlightened archbishop in Cap Haitien, Monseigneur Gayot, who commissioned a poll asking an identical question to both his parish priests and to the general public. The question was this: what did they think was the main mission of the Church and the priests in their community?

The answers could not have been more contrasting. The priests responded that the main mission of the Church was to inspire and provide religious guidance to the parishioners and to bring them the word of God. The ordinary people, on the other hand, felt that the mission of their church and priests was to help people understand and fight against poverty, inequality and oppression. As we can see, all too often the priests and the people look at the world, and the role of religion, in very different ways.

We need to bridge this gap, and make religious leaders more responsive to the people's views and needs, just as the priests try to inculcate certain moral, ethical and spiritual values among the people. And just as priests try to bring to the people the message of God, so should they be prepared to learn from ordinary people's folk

wisdom, and bring to their religious leaders the heart-felt messages of ordinary people.



It is because of the lack of such understanding, that so many crimes are committed, injustice is justified, and harmful traditional practices are perpetuated in the name of religion. Women are oppressed, children are deprived of education, and youth are incited to hate people belonging to other faiths—so often in the name of God and religion. Religious intolerance and indifference to the plight of poor people is an extreme form of poverty of faith and spirituality.

We know that in their core, all the great faiths of the world guide us to live by the universal norms espoused by all religions—peace, brotherhood, tolerance. It is human beings, including religious clergy, who suffer from the poverty of true faith, compassion and spirituality, who teach us otherwise.

This is where we see the great importance of the programme we just launched this morning: Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education.

The toolkit for this programme contains specific modules teaching children about the importance of solidarity for combating poverty, promoting human rights, protecting the environment, and collaborating for a just and peaceful world.

In this increasingly materialistic world, our children desperately need an ethical-moral value system to be imparted through education. We must educate our children how they can contribute to the greater good of humanity; respect for human rights, acceptance of diversity, understanding of issues of development, peace and justice, and a sense of global human solidarity. For this purpose, I really hope that the ethics education toolkit will soon be introduced in all schools and teacher training colleges, and made a core part of the educational curriculum across the world.

We all agree that tackling poverty is important, but why does it necessarily have to start with children? There

are many reasons why I believe strongly that poverty reduction must indeed begin with children.

Consider this: 80 percent of the human brain is formed in the first 18 months of a child's life. Whether a child will grow to live up to his or her full human potential, or the child will be condemned to be a slow learner, and poor achiever in life, is largely determined in the first few years of a child's life, before the child enters school.

The damage caused by malnutrition, infection and poor child care in early childhood often lasts for the whole life, and it cannot be easily reversed later. That is why most developed countries invest heavily in early child development.

Impoverished children become transmitters of poverty, as parents, to the next generation. In a vicious cycle, malnourished girls grow up to become malnourished mothers who give birth to underweight babies and perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Of all the various development interventions, girls' education has the greatest potential impact in reducing poverty. Girls' education and women's literacy are closely correlated with delayed marriage, responsible planning of family size, lower fertility, better child survival, improved child care, better health and nutrition practices, more active participation of women in social and economic activities, and community leadership. Girls' education is, therefore, the single best investment with the most multiplier effects, which any society can make in support of its national development agenda. Girls' education makes it possible for a society to unleash the creative energy of half its population, and is therefore the best way to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

Today the world's development agenda is guided by the Millennium Declaration adopted by world leaders in 2000, which contains a set of very practical, ambitious but achievable Millennium Development Goals. Eradicating poverty is the very first of the MDGs, but all the remaining MDGs also relate directly to the well-being of children. That is why we believe that children are not just part of the MDGs, but they are rightly the very heart and core of MDGs.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, everybody agrees on their desirability, but some questions have been raised about their affordability.

This issue was seriously addressed at the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, where the Secretary-General of the United Nations provided an estimated cost to reach the MDGs. Besides massive efforts by developing countries themselves, it was estimated that in terms of external support, it would cost approximately an additional \$50 billion per year, or a doubling of the

level of foreign aid from all donor countries at that time, to achieve the millennium goals. Now, \$50 billion is a lot of money. But consider that in the context of the world's defense expenditure of \$1 trillion per year, or \$2 billion a week that the US is spending right now in one country—Iraq—alone.

Or consider that in the context of \$1 billion per day in farm subsidies that the US, Europe and Japan spend all year around. Or compare the total European aid investment of less than \$10 per capita per year in Africa, with the \$900 a year that European taxpayers pay as subsidy for every single cow, to protect their dairy farmers from competitive international trade!

Friends, it is not that the world does not have enough resources to fight child poverty; it is more likely that leaders of the world—and we the citizens—do not give enough priority to combating such poverty.

As a great religious leader of our times—the late Martin Luther King Jr. said so eloquently, “There is no deficit in human resources; the deficit is in human will.”

When the world cares enough, resources can always be found. Remember in 1999 there was a huge scare that when the year 2000 came, computer systems that were not Y2K compliant might crash, elevators might stop, dams might burst, electric grids might explode, and Armageddon might arrive. Governments, private companies and individuals found the resources to make themselves Y2K compliant. Hundreds of billions of dollars, unbudgeted previously, were found. Even the poorest countries and many hard-pressed companies found billions to cope with the perceived threat of Y2K.

Somehow 30,000 children dying everyday—10 times as many people as died on 9/11 at the World Trade Center in New York—does not seem to us as enough of an emergency or tragedy. 14 million children being orphaned due to HIV/AIDS alone does not seem to shock us into action. Many of us become numbed by these big figures. But religious leaders and priests, who come into contact with individuals and families every day, must surely feel the pain and agony of these tragedies, one individual at a time.

Please close your eyes for a moment, and think what you would do if your income was just \$1 a day or \$5 for a family—for food, for shelter, for clothing, for education, for health care, for festivals and for funerals?

How can we not make fighting such degrading poverty our individual, institutional and collective priority?

I do not have the time to cite more examples, but we can do extraordinary things to combat poverty and promote the well-being of children at remarkably low-cost.

It is often not money that is the main constraint, but lack of vision, leadership and commitment which retards progress.

We can eradicate the worst manifestations of poverty in our life time, and build the foundations for a world fit for children, if we commit ourselves to that noble task. For as Mahatma Gandhi said so memorably, “The world has enough for everybody's need, but not enough for everybody's greed.”

I believe all of us at this GNRC Forum share a common vision—the vision of a world in which all children have a joyous childhood: where they can play, learn and grow, where they are loved and cared for, where their health and safety are protected and where their gender is not a liability—a world in which their human rights are protected and fulfilled.

Right now, that world remains a dream for tens of millions of children. But it is a dream that I really believe can come true in less than a generation, if we can help generate strong political commitment, sustained public action and genuine community participation, including the participation of children and young people themselves.

The world is two billion children rich, but many of them sadly still fall out of our reach, growing up unhealthy, uneducated and unprotected.

We need to double, triple and quadruple the scale of our programmes, and the intensity of our commitment if we are to end child poverty in our life-time. With such commitment we can build a world in which all children can enjoy a childhood of playing and learning, where they are loved and cherished, their safety and well-being are assured, and where they can grow to adulthood in health, peace and dignity.

This is the idea behind the Global Movement for Children which was launched at the UNGA Special Session on Children.

Religious leaders and faith-based institutions that reach 5 out of 6 billion people on this planet, should now take a more leading role, joining hands with governments, NGOs, international organizations, the private sector and leaders of civil society to give a powerful momentum for this Movement.

In this context, I want to commend GNRC for taking a bold and visionary new initiative calling for “A World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.”

What a fitting response by the world's religious community to commemorate the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on 20 November each year, when all places of worship—churches, temples mosques, synagogues and shrines—in every community all over the world would be the hubs for prayers as well as specific actions to help achieve internationally agreed child rights and development goals for children, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

I must add that while much of our concern is, understandably, with children in poverty in the poorest countries of the world, we must also worry about children in rich countries, and children of the rich in poor countries. These seemingly privileged children are growing up often in broken families, mesmerized by the make-believe world of video games and electronic gadgets that alienate them from the real world.

These young people's ready access and immersion into the fantastic world of entertainment and advertising that glamorizes violence and sex, enhanced with special effects, makes it increasingly difficult for them to distinguish between reality and virtual reality.

Paradoxically, the revolution in information and communication technology today leads children to be more aloof and isolated rather than being engaged in human interaction and community spirit.

Yes, we need to worry about the children of the rich and affluent—in both the industrialized countries and among the wealthy folks of poor countries—who are likely to be the rulers of the world of tomorrow, and who may be growing up in the cocoon of virtual reality today.

Will those "privileged" children have empathy for the poor and the down-trodden? Will they understand how the other half of the poor world lives? It is our job as parents, teachers and community leaders to protect our children from the temptations created by today's tantalizing technology.

Religious leaders are by nature expert communicators, opinion leaders and social mobilizers, accustomed to translating complex texts into understandable messages. We look to you to help convey the key messages of the WFFC, CRC and the MDGs in a language more readily understandable to ordinary people, including children.

As the old African proverb says, "it takes a village to raise a child." And raising children to their full human potential is not just our family duty, but is the ultimate mark of our great human civilization.

Whether a child is born in a poor family in Niger or an affluent one in Norway, whether it is a girl in Afghanistan or a boy in Japan, they all have a right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and other necessary social services, including the right to education.

For this right to be realized, we must ensure that no child lives in poverty and that child development is the centre-point of all human development.

Programmes of poverty alleviation, especially aimed at children in developing countries, must be considered global public goods. This is because by meeting the basic needs of impoverished populations, they contribute

to better global health, reduction of environmental degradation, prevention of conflicts and generation of a sense of global solidarity.

This was perhaps most eloquently stated in a message delivered at the opening of the UNGA Special Session on Children, by two child participants who said most memorably: "We are not expenses, we are investments."

I hope we can send a powerful message from this GNRC Forum to world leaders who will be gathering in Japan, next week at the TICAD Summit in Yokohama and in July at the G-8 Summit in Hokkaido, that as they discuss the weighty issues of trade, aid, development and climate change, they will keep in mind the special needs of the world's children, and the unique opportunity to enlist the younger generation to solve many of our major planetary problems.

Leaders attending the TICAD and G-8 Summits, and their predecessors have made solemn commitments to give first call to meeting the basic needs of children by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopting the Millennium Declaration, and promising to build a World Fit for Children. It is now high time for them to deliver on these promises.

Before I conclude, I want to take this occasion to pay a special tribute to Reverend Takeyasu Miyamoto for his wise vision in establishing the Global Network of Religions for Children. I recall fondly Reverend Miyamoto's memorable speech at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002 when he spoke passionately about the need for global ethics education for children. Today, he must be proud, as we all are, that his vision of global ethics education has taken a concrete shape with this morning's launch of its very practical tool kit.

With the idea of a World Day of Prayer and Action for Children being launched at this Forum, focused on the three transcendental themes of ending violence against children, protecting the earth for future generations, and ensuring that no child lives in poverty, GNRC has helped us reach yet another momentous ethical milestone for children.

Dear friends,

Never before did humankind have the capacity to do so much good, to reach so many, to work with the poor and the oppressed, to empower them, and to promote justice and human rights for all, as we do today.

Let us commit ourselves today to seize this historic opportunity, let us invoke and harness the power of the world's great religious traditions, and our moral leadership, to promote the well-being of children, and to liberate all God's children from the grip of poverty, as the centre-point of all our endeavours, and our sacred duty.

Thank you.

Children's Presentation Addressing "Violence" Theme



Speaker 2: "The Ethical Imperative to End Violence against Children" — Dr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Rapporteur on Children's Rights, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OAS, and former Independent Expert, The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children



I would like to thank the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and UNESCO, UNICEF and the Arigatou Foundation for inviting me to this Third Forum and most particularly Mr. Takeyasu Miyamoto and Ambassador Samuel Koo. I want to extend my warmest greetings to my friends from the UN, educators, development works and young people, all united to reaffirm a commitment to secure the rights of children all over the world.

Violence against children is not a new subject for the international community. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has always addressed the prevalence of different forms of violence. Graça Machel developed a Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. The Yokohama World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which followed the activities

initiated in Stockholm with the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration on sexual exploitation set in motion clear actions by governments to address this aspect of violence against children. The particularity of the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children that I had the great satisfaction to lead is the fact it tackled all forms of violence (with the exception of children in armed conflict) without ranking them—because to consider one form of violence less serious than another would not be acceptable under a human rights approach. The Study, I would like to underline this, was fully grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which affirms that:

"States Parties shall 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 or any other person who has the care of the child." (Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child could not be clearer: States parties must ensure the protection of children from all forms of violence while in the care of individuals or institutions. No violence can be excused. The Convention reinforces what was already assured by the various international human rights treaties that have developed from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Beyond establishing the need for full respect for the physical and personal integrity, the international norm recognizes the particular vulnerability of children to violence and the consequent need for strengthened measures for their protection.

The almost unanimous ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is evidence of this extensive support. Regrettably, the impressive endorsement given to these rights through nice statements or even legal instruments is insufficiently translated to reality by most governmental institutions.

And yet, despite all commitment on paper, there are many who portray child rights as a soft topic in the human rights agenda, somehow not deserving the same attention given to more polemic issues. This truly constrains the effectiveness of any initiative tackling violence against children. Precisely when there is a recognized shared concern, when all States are able to fully commit to a set of principles, we must show we are able to benefit from this support.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, I would like to repeat this, has consistently expressed violence against children as a central concern. In 2000 and 2001 the Committee devoted its days of general discussion to the problems of State violence against children and violence

in the family and in the school. Through different debates it was always clear that despite the wide recognition of the obligation to protect children from violence, children of all ages continued to be frequently vulnerable to violence in all regions of the world.

Inspired by the ground-breaking experience of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on the impact of armed conflict on children, the Committee then recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to conduct an in-depth international study on violence against children. This request was endorsed by both the General Assembly and the Commission of Human Rights, and in 2003 I had the honor of being appointed as the Independent Expert to lead the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children—the first global study on all forms of violence affecting children prepared by the UN system.

The scope of the Study was determined by the Convention – it dealt with all forms of violence affecting all children up to the age of eighteen years, with the exception of violence in situations of conflict since a UN mandate on the child in armed conflict was already in operation. The definition of violence is that of article 19 of the Convention, and also draws on the definition in the World Report on Violence and Health (2002): the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity.

The preparation of such a Study with a global scope and covering so many issues was augmented through a truly participatory process. With the decisive support of Governments, UN entities, and NGOs, the Study managed to engage a large network of individuals and organizations in a number of activities that included regional, sub-regional and national consultations, expert thematic meetings and field visits. In March 2004, a detailed questionnaire was sent to Governments on their approaches to violence against children, 136 countries responded to the request providing a unique picture on the current approaches on this issue. To ensure a thorough understanding, the study also made a comprehensive effort to combine in its analysis the knowledge of professionals with different expertise and from various sectors, from lawyers to public health experts, from social workers to educators.

Another decisive element in this challenging process was the decision to ensure the meaningful participation of children and young people. Particular efforts were made with the support of non-governmental organizations to

ensure that children and young people had their right to be heard respected in a piece of work that would address issues so relevant to their lives.

This challenging Study process was designed to gather the existing knowledge and experience in the field of violence against children—to reflect all regions of the world and the many facets of the problem, as well as bringing to light the formidable number and quality of promising and proven practices within a truly global framework, with the potential to make the key message of the Study a reality: No violence against children is justifiable—All violence is preventable.

The Study calls for an end to all justification to any form of violence against children. It also points out that violence “is no accident”—violence can and must be prevented—and violence against children cannot be legal in any country or in any setting. More importantly, the Study proposes a set of very concrete recommendations to focus the work that Member States do together with international organizations, regional organizations, and civil society to implement their commitment to protect children from all violence. In my report I have put forward a set of twelve overarching recommendations and specific recommendations which apply to the five settings addressed by the study.

The Study confirmed that although being one of the most clearly condemned forms of violence; violence against children is possibly one of the most invisible and prevalent forms. Violence remains unregistered and unpunished, being sometimes even condoned by society under the guise of discipline or tradition. The inadequacy of justice and security systems, and the pretexts of privacy or of an incontestable adult authority over children are used to shield perpetrators and keep violence against children insulated by walls of silence.



The Study also asserts that violence against children takes a variety of forms and is influenced by a wide range of factors, from the personal characteristics of the victim and perpetrator to their social, cultural, and physical

environments. Economic development, social status, age, sex and gender are among the many factors associated with the risk of violence. Although the consequences of violence may vary according to its nature and severity, the short- and long-term repercussions are very often grave and damaging.

Based on these findings, the Study makes 12 overarching recommendations to strengthen the protection of children from violence. These recommendations focus on government responsibility across the very wide range of sectors relevant to the various forms of violence and settings in which violence occurs, and encourage actions with other partners. Many of the recommendations have been heard before, but never before have the various sectors and issues relevant to violence been brought together in a unifying framework for action.

As it is clearly stated by the international jurisprudence, the Study urges the establishment of an explicit foundation and framework of law and policy in which all forms of violence against children in all settings, including all harmful traditional practices, all sexual violence and all corporal punishment are prohibited. Laws certainly do not guarantee immediate change, but without an adequate legal framework change is unlikely to happen.

As States have the duty to prevent and respond to violence, the Study appeals for the strengthening of national commitment and action through continued and coordinated strategies. Effective policies must integrate different Government sectors must be systematic and based on human-rights principles. Long term and sustainable effects are only attainable with the adequate integration of these policies into national planning processes and budgets. The Study also emphasizes investment in prevention as the most effective use of resources to reduce violence against children. While there is a wealth of information on the risk factors associated with preventing violence, very little is done to address them. It is unfortunate that violence is so frequently addressed through reactive and repressive measures in detriment to long term policies addressing root causes.

Where violence is occurring, early detection mechanisms must be in place and victims must be provided with the necessary assistance. We must provide child victims of all forms of violence with sensitive, integrated, and high-quality legal, health and social services, focused on recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. In this sense, accessible and child-friendly protection systems and services are irreplaceable. Successful experiences of simple, accessible, and well-publicized avenues for children or their representatives to report violence, wherever it occurs need to be replicated more widely.

As the process of the study also demonstrates, we must recognize and respect children as partners. If we really want to build child-sensitive policies we must create and support mechanisms and structures to ensure the full participation of children in all aspects of prevention and response in accordance with their best interest.

We must also improve our overall understanding of this hidden problem and how to prevent it and most effectively respond to it. This is only possible through systematic data collection and research. Without comparable and reliable data the impact of the measures taken cannot be interpreted. Without universal birth registration or credible data on mortality causes it is virtually impossible to promote solid policies against violence. Strengthened capacity to monitor and analyze situation where violence occurs can and should be used to inform and improve programs.

More than one year after the Study release there are indications that this process is helping to raise the global awareness on the plight of child victims of violence. Audiences in international, regional and national organizations acknowledge the prevalence of the problem and reaffirm the commitment to eliminate it. A central challenge ahead is to convert the different recommendations proposed by the Study into practical strategies which are relevant to the diverse realities that exist around the world.

Before this Study, international efforts had already raised attention to issues such as the involvement of children in armed conflict, trafficking or the sexual exploitation of children. The promotion of a Study focusing on all forms of violence broadened the agenda, highlighting issues too frequently absent from the international discussion on child rights such as the situation of children in their own homes, in schools or in care and justice systems purportedly responsible for their well-being. The Study also called the attention for the fact that action is needed both in rich and impoverished in regions.

Success or failure in the elimination of violence against children will certainly be associated to the capacity of maintaining a coherent and continuous approach to this problem in various contexts around the world. Perhaps, the main contribution of this UN Study was to bring a logical framework that is multi-disciplinary, combining the expertise of all relevant actors in the process of prevention and responding to violence. Both at international and national levels it is essential to ensure continued high level attention and coordination while addressing the diversity of issues presented by the UN Study on Violence against Children.

After the conclusion of the Study, after years of accumulated recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and numerous additional international efforts, it is not possible to ignore the need to urgently and seriously invest in the protection of children from violence; and it is not possible to continue to ignore that violence is still condoned in many places in contradiction to basic human rights principles. The mechanisms and strategies available are not yet adequately implemented to effectively change the patterns that still allow so much violence to happen. No excuses can be accepted for inaction. The international community cannot fail on such a consensual matter, and children cannot wait any longer.

Children's Presentation Addressing "Environment" Theme



Speaker 3: "The Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth" — Ms. Henriette Rasmussen, Earth Charter Commissioner and former Minister for Social Affairs, Greenland

The aims of the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children and the vision are about the right of every child to live in peace, dignity and wellbeing. It is envisioned we create a world where people of faith and good will of all communities together uphold universal spiritual values and the principles of justice and respect. In such an enlightened world, adults and children alike will live in security as citizens of a shared and caring planet, honoring all life and the environment.



These are very much the same goals for the Earth Charter, of which I have had the privilege to be a member of the commission to write it. We could say, that just like the world community stood together at a critical moment of human history to write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Earth Charter Commission, consisting of people from all over the world, admitted that we are living in a very important moment in Earth's history, and that it is necessary to have an Earth Charter to protect the Earth, because it does not protest against abuse. Therefore, we cultures of the world must get together to protect nature, to respect human rights and to create a world where all can live together in peace and justice. We admit that we human beings have a common responsibility to care for life—both at present and into the future.

Let me quote The Earth Charter for Children:

The Earth is our home: The Earth is only a small planet of the immense universe in which we live. The Earth itself is full of life, with a rich variety of plants, animals and peoples. In order to survive, we as human beings need the soil, the water, the air, the plants and the animals. It is our duty to take care of life on Earth.

The global situation: Today, our way of living often harms the environment. The way that we produce and consume goods depletes the Earth of its supplies of water, air and soil, endangering the life of many plants and animal species. The growing world population continues to drain the Earth of its natural resources. At the same time, we are faced by war, famine, misery, ignorance, disease and injustice.

What can we do? The choice is ours: We can start making changes so that we can build a better future for everyone. The Earth Charter gives us a path to follow.

Everybody is responsible. To change our world we need to be responsible to our actions, because everything that we do is interconnected—everything on our planet is woven together into the fabric of life. We need think about the way that we use resources and the way that we care for plants and animals. We need to think about the way that we treat other people. If we all take responsibility for our own actions, we can start to work together to care for the present and future well being of the human family and of all the living things on this planet. All of us can share in the hope for the future."

This children's version and many other educational materials based on the Earth Charter are being used widely in schools, colleges, universities and seminaries to educate about shared ethical values and global ethics, and provide an excellent overview of what is required to build a global culture of peace in the 21st Century.

To strengthen the educational use of the Earth Charter, Earth Charter International (ECI) operates an Earth Charter Center for Education at the UN-mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica. ECI has also just launched a new programme on religion and sustainability that seeks to help religious communities to understand and act on the global challenges of our time.

The Earth Charter is a valuable teaching resource for a number of reasons:

- *It emphasizes that all human beings are one human family interrelated with the larger community of life and all share a common destiny.*
- *It clarifies the critical challenges and choices facing the human community.*
- *It presents an inclusive, integrated ethical vision that builds on international law and the findings of UN summits, draws upon the wisdom of the world's religions, and expresses the consensus on shared values taking form in civil society.*
- *The Earth Charter principles present a comprehensive definition of the meaning of sustainable development and they can be read as core elements for creating a culture of peace.*

UNESCO's conference of member states has endorsed the Earth Charter as a valuable ethical framework for sustainable development and teaching tool, and Earth Charter International is a partner with UNESCO in promoting the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

In October 2007, ECI Council Co-Chair Steven Rockefeller briefed UN member states on the Earth Charter in an Informal Hearing of Civil Society that was held in the context of the UN General Assembly's High Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation and Understanding for Peace. Rockefeller especially highlighted the instructive methodology that was used in the unprecedented worldwide consultation process that generated the Earth Charter.

Emphasis was put on the increasing interdependence of all peoples and attention focused on the fundamental challenges faced by the whole of humanity. The goal was to identify widely shared ethical values and principles on which the human family must act in order to address these challenges. We found that people from different cultures and religious traditions often have very different philosophical and religious reasons for embracing ethical values. In the Earth Charter consultation process we respected and learned from these differences, but we did not try to bridge them. Instead we focused primarily on reaching agreement regarding the basic ethical principles that should guide conduct in the 21st Century. With this focus and close attention to the use of

appropriate language, we were able to give expression to the consensus on critical ethical values that is taking form in the emerging global civil society.

Drawing on the Earth Charter's significant contribution to promoting collaboration and understanding among different religions, cultures, and sectors of society, and building on its many first hand experiences in promoting and implementing ethics education for the protection of our planetary home, I would like to extend ECI's heartfelt invitation to the Global Network of Religions for Children to explore using the Earth Charter as an instrument for raising awareness about the global challenges of our time and making clear the interdependence of environmental sustainability, universal human rights, social and economic justice, and non-violence, democracy, and peace.

The vision of the Earth Charter that individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and multinational institutions throughout the world, including United Nations General Assembly and its agencies, acknowledge the Earth Charter, embrace its values and principles, and work collaboratively to build a just, sustainable and peaceful global society.

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a peaceful global society in the 21st century. It has already been endorsed by thousands of organizations and prominent global institutions. It seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of interdependence and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the human family and the larger living world. It is an expression of hope and call for greater global partnership and action at a critical juncture in our common history. The Earth Charter is an inclusive ethical vision. It recognizes that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides a clear, comprehensive framework for thinking about and addressing these issues.

At a time when major changes in how we think and live are urgently needed, the Earth Charter challenges us to examine our values and to choose a better way. It calls on us all, to search for common ground in the midst of our diversity and to embrace a new ethical vision shared by growing numbers of people in many nations and cultures throughout the world, just like this great conference is seeking new ways.

In fact we have also a Japanese member of the Earth Charter Commission who made the Charter, and is it the Honorable Member of Parliament Mme. Wakako Hironaka. She has been doing great work by translating the document to Japanese and published material with examples of how it could be interpreted and used.

Let me also draw your attention to the Earth Charter Youth Initiative. Youth from all over the world are very active in interpreting and working with the Earth Charter in educating for youth leadership. One of the newly launched projects is collecting personal experiences of oneness, isn't it a magic word? 'Human existence is full of moments of connection that transcend our separate realities—the barriers that divide us from each other and the Earth—and reveal a common oneness, often when we least expect it.' You who are attending this conference may wish to contribute. Their invitation is for all ages, cultures and religions. The contributions for such submissions of stories and photos will be collected from all over the world and they will be published in a book to be released in 2009.

Please let me end by wishing everyone assembled here an inspiring and successful conference, and please let me quote the final lines of the Earth Charter:

"Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life."

Thank you very much.

Thematic Group Sessions I: Panel Discussion Addressing the Theme of Poverty

Moderator:

Dr. Mustafa Ali, Secretary General of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL)

Panelists:

Dr. Kul Gautam, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega, President of World Council of Churches

Rev. Munemichi Kurozumi, Vice Chief Patriarch, Kurozumikyō

Mr. Abdalla Ali Amour (child)

Ms. Viviana Raquel Castillo (child)

Rapporteur:

Mr. Vinod Hallan, Senior Education Adviser, National Strategies, UK

In a world that belongs to all, why do such obscene disparities exist? Why is there a growing epidemic of obesity in the developed world, while nearly 800 million go hungry each day? These were just two of the questions posed by the youth representatives in the discussion on poverty. Mr. Abdalla Ali Amour expressed the desire of the youth to be involved in the resolution of poverty, which is a universal issue, and Ms. Viviana Raquel Castillo stated that poverty can be a lack of both economic and spiritual resources.

Rev. Munemichi Kurozumi stated there are two kinds of poverty: extreme poverty and relative poverty. Relative poverty is a comparison of the materialistic affluence of others which leads to a sense of depression or misery as the poor come to the realization that their best efforts will never bridge the income gap. Both forms of poverty can lead to conflict, violence and environmental degradation.

Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega discussed the relationship between poverty, economic, environmental and geopolitical issues and called for unity for the eradication of poverty and the pursuit of policies that affirm life.



In response to the questions of the young participants, Dr. Kul Gautam gave the following observations. He encouraged Mr. Ali Amour to question the disparity in the economic development assistance figures in comparison to military expenditures, and to consider universal education beyond the Millennium Development Goals which only stipulate universal primary education. Dr. Gautam agreed with Ms. Castillo's comment on spiritual poverty and reminded that many of the world's problems are no longer confined within national borders. Assisting developing countries is a win-win situation that benefits even developed countries. He spoke of the potential financial savings that would be realized if polio were eradicated in developing countries.

Questions were posed to the panelists under the theme of poverty, including how to influence capitalist nations, how to empower the interreligious community to influence the balance of power between multi-national corporations (MNCs), the relationship between poverty and corruption, the survival of indigenous communities, and how to break the cycle of poverty.

Concerning indigenous communities, Rev. Dr. Ortega commented on the high level of organization of indigenous people who were mobilized by the Bolivian president, who was himself, of indigenous background. She cautioned that as religious organizations, it was important to respect the belief systems of indigenous people, to refrain from forcing organized religion onto them, and to include them in more interfaith dialogue.

Regarding pressure on MNCs, Dr. Gautam advocated a carrot-and-stick approach whereby boycotts would be organized against companies failing to operate beyond transparent CSR activities, and referenced the power of the Nestle boycott. He commended the amazing power of children to influence politics, citing the significant increase in Italy's official development assistance (ODA) expenditure as a result of youth advocacy efforts.

A question was posed as to how large organizations like the United Nations can control investments and expenditures in developing countries that have been unable to control them independently. Rev. Dr. Ortega stressed the importance of involving experts from within the country to address these issues and a comment was made that such international institutions should assume more of a monitoring rather than control function.

The group raised the issue of communicating the children's voice to the leaders of the G8, and it was noted that one of the young persons at the GNRC Third Forum would attend the J8 (Junior Eight) Summit meeting held in conjunction with the G8 Summit in Hokkaido, where young people would have the opportunity to discuss global issues such as poverty and environmental degradation in private with the G8 leaders.

Bringing the session to a close, the panelists each delivered a few closing remarks. Dr. Gautam pointed out a compelling statistic from Tajikistan where child poverty was 5% higher than the national average, further underscoring the importance of poverty reduction programs that begin with, and focus on, children. Furthermore, he stated that it was in the best interests of MNCs to promote enlightened capitalists—well-nourished, educated, and healthy workers, consumers, and buyers—for their long-term interests.

Thematic Group Sessions II: Panel Discussion Addressing the Sub-Themes of Poverty

The moderator summarized the earlier discussion which focused on the use of the toolkit to address the cycle of poverty, understanding that 800 million people go hungry every day. Two different variations of poverty were also discussed: extreme poverty and relative poverty, which the advancement of globalization has made even more evident as a cause of depression and violence. Hunger, violence, and many of the world's problems are no longer confined by geopolitical borders; what happens in one country will have profound effects on the rest of the world. The conflict in the Middle East, AIDS, and poverty are everyone's problems.

Poverty is not just a lack of income. Many kinds of deprivation exist, so both economic and spiritual solutions are necessary. As religious leaders, it is important not to underestimate the power of hope. If there is faith, there is hope, and hope can change the world.

Greed, corruption, and consumerism were cited as causes of poverty. It was proposed that, in fact, it is in the best interest of MNCs to keep certain parts of the world in extreme poverty so that it is easier to exploit the natural and human resources of these regions. Dr. Gautam reflected on the discussions, remarking that it was imperative to offer positive solutions and inspire people to do the right things. While acknowledging the effectiveness of boycotts he stated that there were other meaningful instruments to encourage CSR of MNCs. In

the drafting of the final recommendations, he urged the formulation of positive, constructive, inspiring, action-oriented recommendations.

“If children are at the core of so many of the world’s pressing issues, why haven’t they been invited to participate in UN-led discussions?” asked one of the youth participants. Dr. Gautam advised that there had been a number of occasions in the last 10 years when young people had been invited to UN discussions and indeed had played a very important role. In fact, children were important members of the national delegations at the 2002 General Assembly Special Session on Children, and were also invited on behalf of UNICEF and participating NGOs. This occasion was not simply a symbolic gesture; two young people addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations itself which had a profound and lasting impact on many of the participants.

Non-child-related meetings also merit young people’s participation. However, while the participation of children in UN-level fora is important, the real difference is made at the community level. It was proposed that their participation in the Third Forum conferred a responsibility on the part of the GNRC to further develop the necessary skills for civic participation. Intergenerational dialogue should foster intergenerational partnerships and the value of youth participation in discussions was reaffirmed.

Subsequently, discussions took place concerning the sub-themes of promoting ethics as a tool to eradicate poverty; drawing on religious teachings and heritages to address poverty; and putting children first in human development.

The groups presented concrete recommendations for the Outcome Document. On the promotion of ethics education, Group 1 discussed corruption, economic science, being more action-oriented, empathy, and creating more networks. They suggested enhanced collaboration with organizations such as the GNRC; ethics education and examination of law enforcement to combat corruption; dialogue with various sectors of society; and the creation of spaces for interreligious participation.

Group 2 examined communication with people from diverse religious backgrounds including non-believers by drawing upon the common themes first and religion second because often times religion inhibits the ability to connect with society. Issues which have no borders—such as poverty, infectious diseases and such—should additionally be discussed at the local level to increase

awareness and assign individual responsibility for their resolution. The group recommended free access to ethics education for all people, particularly children who are unable to receive a formal education due to child labor, disease, and so forth.

The discussions in Group 3 focused on seven areas: the child as the base of origin; the involvement of children in the formulation of children’s laws; children as the source of spirituality within society; the responsibility of families to develop children’s potentials at a young age; mutual learning between parent and child; individual and interrelated development; and the inclusion of ethics education in the educational system. Accordingly, the group recommended the creation of peace clubs and GNRC cells or collaboration with existing organizations presently engaged in the promotion of children’s rights; the empowerment of children at a very early age so that they can be powerful advocates of their own rights; advocacy of strong family values; participation in the social auditing of the rights of children; creation of youth spaces to promote interreligious study groups; eradication of poverty through ethics education; GNRC-UNICEF collaboration to train and introduce the ethics toolkit; and the promotion of social awareness among others.

Thematic Group Sessions I: Panel Discussion Addressing the Theme of Violence

Moderator:

Dr. Heidi Hadsell
President of Hartford Seminary

Panelists:

Dr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Rapporteur on the Rights of Children, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States, and former Independent Expert, The United Nations Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Children
Dr. Gabriel Habib, Director of Religious and Cultural Relations, Middle East Fellowship (MEF)
Ms. Mercedes Roman, GNRC Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Mr. Mohamed Said Hani (child)
Ms. Naomi Okano (child)
Ms. Avani Jariwala (child)

Rapporteur:

Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena
Senior Lecturer, University of Colombo

The GNRC prides itself on providing children with a venue to express themselves. Accordingly, the children shared their thoughts and conclusions with their adult counterparts during the intergenerational dialogues in the thematic group sessions.

Mr. Hani, a boy from Kenya, presented the results of his group's discussion addressing the theme of violence. Through a frank exchange of opinions the following were identified as sources of violence against children: sexual exploitation of young boys and girls as a result of poverty and food scarcity; the displacement of families and their exploitation brought about by climate change and the increasing occurrence of natural disasters; the practice of corporal punishment in schools; female genital mutilation; and increasing child neglect due to devastating diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Ms. Okano, a young girl from Japan, shared her experience of being bullied at school. Despite her psychological pain, she acknowledged that other children were suffering even more than she had and she expressed her wish for their future happiness. She wisely observed that children around the world share a common hope for peace, despite differences in culture and language.

A young girl from California reported that the expression of peace to help victims of violence, and the diffusion of love and happiness to people around the world were powerful tools for the prevention of violence. Coupled with open and non-violent communication, these techniques can effectively reduce the exposure of children to dangerous and life-threatening situations.

Ms. Okano was asked for her perceptions on the causes of school violence. Speaking from her personal experiences, she felt that the tendency to overlook the positive qualities of individuals and other factors culminated in bullying and school violence. Others cited inappropriate teacher-student relationships as a factor of violence at school and the role of the government to protect and prosecute such cases was mentioned. It was further stated that poverty should never be used as a justification for inappropriate teacher-student relationships.

Dr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro reminded that schools should be a safe haven for children, but more often than not, today in many countries schools are becoming a very dangerous place, particularly for girls. Poverty cannot be used to justify teacher misconduct and it is the responsibility of Governments to prosecute this type of

practice. Furthermore, adults must listen to children who report inappropriate behavior on the part of teachers.

The youth representatives were asked to elaborate on the discussion concerning reproductive health, female genital mutilation (FGM), and child marriages. A member of the audience strongly condemned the practice of FGM in Africa, where religion was used to justify the mutilation of young girls. In Kenya alone, countless girls have been subjected to FGM, leaving them maimed, irreparably scarred or worse, and excluded from the benefits of a formal education. In Ethiopia, Christianity is used to perpetuate the practice. Religion must be used to end FGM. Violence against children is not homogenous, and the issue must be a top priority on the African agenda.

Speaking from a Middle Eastern perspective, Dr. Gabriel Habib depicted an ethical climate where "might makes right" characterized by a spirit of elimination versus dialogue. He cited the rise of dangerous dictatorships, chronic poverty, and the emergence of ethno-religious nationalism as drivers of ethnic and religious violence, where even young children are recruited as suicide bombers in the name of religion. Yet, while religion can be exploited to incite violence and war, it can also be used as a spiritual driver of reconciliation and peace. Recognizing this, there is an urgent need to enhance ethics education, interfaith dialogue, and pressure on governments to adopt fair policies of peace.



A South African woman felt that the increase in psychological and physical school violence stemmed from prejudice as a result of minimal interaction with others of different races or religious faiths, citing xenophobia as a common problem. She proposed the creation of opportunities for children to share music, cultural traditions and engage in dialogue.

Violence against children can occur both inside and outside of the home. Domestic violence is often more

difficult to identify and eradicate because the perpetrators are members of the victim's immediate family. Domestic violence is perpetuated by a culture of subordination—women as subordinates to men, children as subordinates to adults. A young boy from the audience asked Ms. Roman what instruments children can use to prevent violence from adults. Ms. Roman responded that unfortunately, violence against children has traditionally been considered as something natural, noting that physical aggression toward another adult is illegal, but the same legal standards are not always applied to physical aggression by an adult to a child. The idea that it is acceptable to discipline children with violence must be eliminated and the burden must not fall on the children for the prevention of violence.

An audience member asked about violence against unborn and very young children, observing that traditional discussions focused on violence against children age 6-18. Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child fails to address the rights of unborn children. Ms. Roman drew attention to the foreword of the Convention which states that “the prescriptions of this Convention are directed to the born and unborn child.”

Additional comments were made including a call for more attention to the crisis in Somalia where more than one million people have been internally or externally displaced, and a woman from India asked how the problem of infanticide in her country can be eliminated, to which a panelist prescribed a mix of accountability on the part of the government to prosecute perpetrators, and efforts to work with the local community.

Ms. Mercedes Roman made a few concluding remarks. She called for enhanced participation in the Convention which has come into conflict with some governments, namely the United States. Wary of empowering children with too many rights, the United States has failed to complete the full ratification process of the Convention for fear of undermining the rights of parents. Bullying and school violence are a natural consequence of children growing up in a culture which glamorizes, propagates, and commercializes violence. Against this backdrop, the ethics education toolkit is a most fitting and practical tool to address violence against children and foster not only tolerance, but appreciation of cultural and religious differences.

Children, portraying their reflections on violence through art, presented their illustrations before the session was closed.

Thematic Group Sessions I: Panel Discussion Addressing the Theme of Environment

Moderator:

Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn, International Consultant on Human Rights and Human Development

Panelists:

Ms. Henriette Rasmussen, Commissioner, Earth Charter, former Minister of Social Affairs, Greenland

Dr. Anwar Fazal, Chairman Emeritus, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)

Dr. Kimio Uno, Professor, Chuo University

Ms. Aydan Allahyarova (child)

Mr. Soya Kurokuma (child)

Rapporteur:

Mr. Philip Leivers, Religious Educational Advisor, Children's Services, Solihull Borough Council

The first day of the Third Forum brought together more than 1,300 adults and 42 children to engage in interfaith dialogue, yet there was an important constituency missing: future generations. Prof. Kimio Uno remarked on this significance because of the tendency to discount the future; US\$100 today may not be US\$100 next year. In discussions on environmental preservation, it is imperative to keep this unrepresented party in mind. Commenting on Prof. Uno's comparison to the devaluation of currency, a woman from Israel observed that people were living in a constant state of scarcity, where the more someone else has—money, goods, and resources—the less you have. Whether in the context of the environment or everyday life, people find themselves chronically deficient; spirituality can provide a refuge. Additionally, participants were asked to consider the children of other living things—animals, plants—as there was a tendency to only examine the human responsibility and human impact.

Dr. Anwar Fazal stressed the importance of collaboration with other current movements to multiply the momentum for change. He noted organizations such as the International Society for Ecological Economics and the Eco-Ethics International Union. Additional comments were voiced concerning how to balance economic growth with environmental conservation in developing countries and discussions on mobilization at the grassroots level in light of the perceived ineffectiveness of international institutions such as the United Nations and local governments.

The youth participants were asked about apathy concerning environmental conservation among their peers and a girl from Belgium felt that most Belgian youth were concerned about protecting the earth. She stressed the importance of strengthening public transportation and indoctrinating an eco-conscious lifestyle from an early age. For example, by promoting the use of public transportation among teens before they are legally able to drive, many will continue the practice into adulthood.

Prof. Dr. Hyun Kyung Chung from the Republic of Korea stated that a paradigm shift would be required to cease viewing the earth as simply a future supply of resources, and to recognize nature's intrinsic value. She introduced the concept of "eco-justice" and felt that society today was poisoned by greed, ignorance, and hatred. A suggestion was made for the proposal of an international declaration to protect the environment in times of conflict. Speaking from her personal experience, a young girl explained that nearly one million people had been displaced during the conflict in Azerbaijan resulting in increased stress on natural resources and the environment. Many historical and natural treasures had been lost and there had been dramatic declines in the flora and fauna of her country.

Other recommendations included a focus on human resources and drawing upon the creativity and optimism of children. Attention was drawn to the quality of environmental studies in schools where many schools lacked engaging materials and qualified teachers, and a suggestion was made to include a prayer for the environment on November 20, the designated Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions.

A member of the audience spoke on the importance of concrete action as he described poverty as the world's most grievous form of discrimination. He proposed the concept of *akirameru*, clarifying and giving up—clarifying the reality of the situation and then giving up that which is not beneficial to the earth and to humanity.

Many participants cited mass consumerism and materialism as causes of environmental degradation and a double standard was pointed out in that capitalism thrives on competition in the market—we live in a highly-competitive world—yet, in order to combat environmental issues, cooperation is paramount, which blatantly contradicts these long-established economic and social principles.

The panelists delivered closing remarks, calling for structural, behavioral, and lifestyle changes to support

environmental conservation. Dr. Fazal made reference to the mass media as "weapons of mass deception" for their ability to propagate consumerist lifestyles and ideals. The panelists concluded that sustainable development was a difficult issue to discuss due to its intangible nature, and felt that religion could play a supportive role in the climate change debate.

Thematic Group Sessions II: Panel Discussion Addressing the Sub-Themes of Environment

The morning session of this thematic group on the second day began with a prayer calling for self-reflection and mindfulness of future generations.

Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education of the child should be directed to respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and development of cultural identity. Furthermore, the Convention places importance on the development of respect for the natural environment. These stipulations directly speak to the relationship between education and environmental conservation.

Ms. Henriette Rasmussen spoke about the dramatic effects of climate change in the Arctic where the consequences of global warming were impacting daily life, altering the traditional diet, and increasing rates of cancer. Prof. Uno proposed enhancing the ethics education toolkit by providing an Internet-accessible, multi-media platform, in English and other languages, where children could benefit from experiential learning. For example, visual images of the traditional diet of Iceland, or graphs showing the increasing levels of pollution could be valuable learning tools.



Earth is not inherited from our ancestors; it is borrowed from our children. This assumption necessitates a shift in the concept of environmental management from "parenthood" to "planethood." Dr. Fazal expanded on the three fundamentals of planethood: balance and harmony;

trusteeship and stewardship; and accountability—to the future and the Almighty. He proposed five actions: increase consciousness of the natural and simple things in life; cherish inspiration to spark motivation, such as a partnership with the Global 500 with UNEP; link up with long-established movements like the Earth Charter, UNEP, etc. to multiply and accelerate impact; promote universal adoption of days of action such as Wet Lands Day, Earth Day, etc.; and advance the virtual/visual agenda to engage all generations through a multi-media informational platform. Additionally, the concept of environmental rights was proposed, which were regarded as equally important as child rights and human rights. The preservation of life, the condoning of theft and dishonesty, and the equality of men and women were identified as common hallmarks of diverse religious faiths. Earth was compared to Mecca and Jerusalem, and a planet earth pilgrimage was proposed.

Other interventions were raised concerning global warming. Water in its liquid form absorbs heat and is a contributing factor to global warming. The Kyoto Protocol does not make reference to water because it is too difficult to calculate precisely how much it contributes to global warming, but it is certainly an accelerating factor.

To counter the effects of global warming, energy consumption must be reduced. The concept of a “power diet” was proposed which would require the involvement of the entire family. Children were identified as effective teachers, and the youth participants confirmed that they learned best from their peers. Eco-consciousness requires a comprehensive re-evaluation of our lifestyles. For example, the aircraft emissions from a single roundtrip flight are equivalent to the entire annual household emissions of a single family. The Japanese participants introduced the concept of *mottainai*, which is an awareness and appreciation of the intrinsic value of all things. Effective information exchange was central to the discussions on methods to combat climate change.

The youth participants expressed concerns over the low priority of animals on the climate change agenda. Ms. Rasmussen referred to the Earth Charter which is underpinned by four main pillars: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; democracy, non-violence and peace. The Charter states that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings. She noted that in Greenland, although animals were killed for the survival of the people, this

power was not abused. One of the youth participants proposed the adoption of a convention on the rights of animals and plants and called for more concrete action on the part of the GNRC and UNICEF.

Many of the comments and recommendations reflected the words of Mahatma Gandhi: Be the change you want to see in the world. Small, seemingly insignificant, individual changes, collectively add up to powerful and effective actions. A young student from Tokyo explained the efforts of her school peers who contribute to environmental conservation by collecting trash, recycling plastic bottles for use in school uniforms, lowering the temperature of air conditioning, and collecting aluminum tabs from soda cans.

Opinions were exchanged on the issue of trusteeship. As stakeholders and beneficiaries of our planet, the international community must unite in examining ways to respond to this responsibility and implement concrete ways of living in trusteeship. Too often there is a sense of complacency as society waits for governments and relevant organizations to take action on their behalf. Individuals must begin to consider what they can do and work in cooperation for the better good. As governments decentralize, individuals will be more empowered than ever before to take action at the local level. Just as institutions have a role in community-building, religious communities have an equally important role to speak about inward growth and to find applications to external situations. People of all faiths must find the bridge between spirituality and social action.

Several participants raised the issue of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the need to engage corporations in order to ensure compatibility of profit making and environmental preservation. Emphasis was again focused on the use of multi-media such as YouTube to reach larger audiences, particularly the younger generation. Dr. Fazal talked about environmental metrics such as the Body Burden awareness campaign, which measures the levels of toxins and chemical substances in a person’s body, as well as the ecological footprint measuring system. In closing, Dr. Fazal proposed the involvement of a storyteller from the Global International Storytellers Conference at the next GNRC Forum to take part in a storytelling session which would revitalize the traditional conference modality.

Welcome Reception

A welcome reception was held at the RIHGA Royal Hotel, hosted by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, President of the Arigatou Foundation and Leader of Myochikai, and the organizing committee of the forum. The reception featured remarks by various distinguished guests and a special performance by internationally known singer, author and founder of the Child Honouring philosophy, Raffi Cavoukian.



Sunday, 25 May (Day 2)

PLENARY II

The second day of the Forum began with a scripture reading by children from three religious traditions. The children led the group in the reciting of the Lord's Prayer, a hallmark of the Christian faith. Next, a song was performed by participants from the Hindu faith, and lastly, there was a reading from the Jewish scripture.

Remarks

Most Ven. Kojun Handa, Supreme Priest of the Tendai Buddhist Denomination (read by Ven. Koken Yamamoto, Executive Vice-President of Enryakuji-Temple, Mt. Hiei)



It is indeed deeply significant that we are assembled here today in Hiroshima, an international city of peace, for the hosting of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) Third Forum. I would like to extend my deepest respect to everyone who has gathered here in an expression of their devotion to the mission of ensuring a future for the children of the world. You all have my heartfelt gratitude.

It goes without saying that the very fact that the Arigatou Foundation, established under the auspices of Myochikai, is devoting its utmost efforts to ensuring the wellbeing of the children of the next generation under the distinguished guidance of our Chairman, Rev. Miyamoto, is indeed the representation of a Bodhisattva spirit. For their undertaking, we owe our deepest gratitude.

If we turn our eyes to the world around us and gaze upon the situation facing our children today, we see many regions engulfed in conflict around the world, and consequently, children are unwillingly exposed to violence resulting in casualties, deaths, and deep psychological trauma. Reports that emerge from such regions and from many developing nations depict a dire situation marked

by poverty and deep economic disparities in which children are deprived of the basic necessities, including sufficient food and education.

At the same time, if we turn our eyes to those regions of the world that are considered "advanced nations," including Japan, we see a ubiquitous emphasis on excessive material wealth, a belief in the ultimate supremacy of the economy, and many negative facets of our Internet-based society in which children are corrupted through the damage inflicted upon them, increasing the likelihood that they will engage in thoughtless and heartless criminal activities. Looking at such a situation makes one wonder why there are so many words and actions that indicate a loss of our very humanity. If we are to address these issues, we must move beyond simply a point-by-point approach. I believe it is important for us to foster a sense of faith and spiritual activities that may serve as the very underlying principles of our humanity.

Under such circumstances, it is imperative that religious leaders gather together in one venue that transcends national boundaries and religious differences and formulate effective measures to ameliorate the current situation facing our children from the perspective of people of faith. As such, I have great expectations for the outcome of this gathering.

It is indeed unfortunate that I am unable to address you in person at the Forum. It is my earnest desire to ensure that mercy and salvation be extended to all children, today and in generations to come, who are suffering from conflict, hunger, abuse, and poverty, and with that in mind, I herein express my heartfelt prayer for the great success of this forum.

Rabbi Dr. Golan Ben-Chorin, Director of Congregational Learning, Temple Emeth



Hear Oh Israel (Deuteronomy 6;4), listen carefully all who struggle with humanity and engage with God (Genesis 32;28). A calling to our spirit, a demand made

upon us by the spark of the divine in our soul; be present, be mindful, and make meaning of that which we perceive. Let justice guide our actions.

The words of Deuteronomy may inspire us we learn together:

“For exceedingly near to you is that which I have commanded, in your mouth, and in your heart to observe it.” (Deuteronomy 30;14)

The outpouring from the depths of our hearts, channelled through mind and emotion, forming words and ideas which flow through our mouths is the purest form of education. We are commanded; “Teach them diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6;7). We are all those children, curious, motivated to understand, passionately making meaning of our experiences.

As the prophet Hosea proclaims -

For Israel is youth, and I love him, (11;1) “Love”—a passion shared by all human kind. “Youth”—being open to learning and change. As loved youth we too are on “an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world.” (Parker Palmer) We recognize that “learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us to go further more easily.” (Jerome Bruner)

But where in the world are we going?

We live in a time in which free choice is unparalleled in human history while many people are expressing emptiness and a void of spiritual meaning. We are reaching the depths of the seas and the far corners of space while natural disasters, intensified by human-made conditions, destroy thousands of lives in minutes. Technological abilities grow rapidly, and with them the gap between the wealthy and poor. Is there promise in globalization or just the threat of global warming? The blessing of science harnessed for medical and agricultural advancement or, as this very ground memorializes—harnessed to proliferate horrific power of destruction? The breaking down of barriers by modern technologies or the breakdown of ethics and moral commitment?

We see the deconstruction of ethical commitment on the one hand and poisoning of the globe by fundamentalism on the other. Many are drawn like moths to the fire to either extreme. People are clinging to a false sense of security derived from a desire for simple answers to the complex realities of our lives. There are those who exploit religion in order to spread simple messages of hatred and bigotry. Fundamentalism is a dangerously simple answer to a complex reality. Cloaked in anger, fear and aggression, its false messengers promote violence against fellow human beings created in the image of God.

Modern communications engulf us with events from around the world and we are challenged!

And Adonai God called to the person and said to him, where are you? (Genesis 3;9)

We who strive to infuse our lives with holiness must meet this challenge. Our teachings call us to recognize that we are all elements linked in a complex environment. Our traditions teach that love, justice, and a belief in the inherent value of life make us responsible for this environment and for all human kind. Judaism promotes a passionate way of life. Awakening us from the tendency of taking life for granted to a commitment to act. The interaction between religions can enhance this understanding. Together we can celebrate our interconnectedness and ability to change the world.

As a response to the simple answers which distort reality, we go beyond the “either-or” thinking. Either I am right OR you are right! A single human being is not an “either-or”! Each one is complex. We are both body and soul, motivated by desire and rational thought, shaped by emotions and principles, nature and culture. To be whole, touching upon holiness, means recognizing complexity and celebrating diversity. As individuals are complex so too is the human existence. That is the blessing in the gathering of various faiths. We learn from each other, we teach each other. Each tradition offers unique gifts, each a unique narrative with which to enhance the understanding of life.

The power of tradition is that it lives in the three dimensions of time: The past, the present, and the possible. Children are the embodiment of the possible. We are charged with the question—what paths are we leading them on? What opportunities of growth and flourishing are we providing for the future?

We gather here in a multitude of voices and beliefs, promoting united action from a variety of faith traditions. The religions of today must teach a deep commitment to a particular set of beliefs and traditions, while embracing diversity and valuing pluralism. We are each deeply rooted in our own tradition. This grounds us and enables us to recognize that the truth of the other, even though it is different from mine, is valuable and holds true for her and him. Each one of us, from within our own religion attests to unity beyond uniformity!

One—is a powerful designator of God. The unique quality of God’s “oneness” is God’s ability to encompass and embrace all the blessed variety and sustaining diversity of humankind.

God—that which is experienced but not understood. That which is a driving force in my life but does not comply with the categories of “either or thinking”. God imprints upon me optimism stronger than the shadow of threat and fear. Striving for Justice, nurturing of body-mind-soul,

I am motivated to question, to search, to celebrate, and ultimately to share a message of hope which ignites the passion for that which is possible.

GNRC-UNICEF Joint Study, “Children in World Religions”: A Work in Progress—A Brief Presentation by UNICEF and GNRC

Following an agreement at the GNRC Second Forum, UNICEF and the GNRC embarked on a joint study. A team was formulated of representatives from diverse faith traditions to discuss methods of cooperation with the objective of defining how to educate, minister and care for the world’s children. The joint study examined the norms and traditions of the various faith traditions, and then compared these to the norms and principles reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child to determine how the study could serve as a bridge between religious communities and the Convention. The study group has convened three times to chart the course of the study, to share individual research findings, and to engage in interreligious reflection.

Under the umbrella of ideals versus reality, the theme has explored various aspects of the articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although the final results are not yet available, the study will focus on advancing gender issues, providing a safe and enabling environment for children, and better promoting children’s participation.

Although significant milestones have been achieved, the study is still very much a work in progress. Religious leaders have a long history of collaboration with UNICEF at both the international as well as country levels. Recent collaborations include the Hands On publication which was jointly produced by the World Conference of Religions for Peace, UNICEF and UNAIDS. UNICEF values the ability that religious leaders and faith-based organizations have to take action on issues related to child survival, child protection, education and HIV/AIDS. Further efforts must be made to bring together the religious and development perspectives in order to influence public opinion and rally central and local governments to do what is necessary to achieve concrete results for children. Religious leaders and interfaith organizations are in a unique position to counteract stigma and discrimination, create opportunities for reconciliation and hope, and provide prevention and care.

Building on the work of the international team of experts, the joint study project will offer a rationale for interreligious cooperation to contribute toward delivering results for

children. The outcome of this study will help develop tools for use by faith-based communities to internalize the norms and principles set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and put into practice children’s rights-based activities and programs.

Following the UNICEF-GNRC overview, the participants broke into thematic groups for discussion.

THEMATIC GROUP SESSIONS II

Each of three thematic groups continued to discuss the sub-themes in their thematic areas. Available summaries are included above, by theme, under “Thematic Group Sessions I,” which starts on page 39.

Visit to Peace Memorial Museum

Participants were given extra time to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park.



THEMATIC GROUP SESSIONS III

The three thematic groups adopted sets of recommendations. (See pages 71-77 for full texts.)

REGIONAL SESSIONS I

The seven regional discussion groups reported on progress in GNRC initiatives over the last four years, shared best practices, considered the Forum themes, offered input for the Declaration (Forum Outcome Document) and planned ahead for the work in the coming four years. (See pages 78-94 for the official regional reports from the Forum.)



Monday, 26 May (Day 3)

REGIONAL SESSIONS II

Each of seven regional discussion groups adopted guidelines and action priorities for GNRC work over the next four years. (See pages 78-94 for the official regional reports from the Forum.)



SPECIAL SESSION: DIALOGUE WITH GLOBAL LEADERS



Hon. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General,
United Nations

Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF

Panelists:

Ms. Anam Wasey (child)

Mr. Isaac Lukumayi Peter (child)

Ms. Rama Ndao Diouf, Special Advisor to H.E.

Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal

Prof. Susumu Shimazono, Department of Religious
Studies, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology,
The University of Tokyo

Ven. Gijun Sugitani, former President, Tendai Buddhist
Denomination

Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General, World
Conference of Religions for Peace

Moderator:

Dr. Kul Gautam, former Assistant Secretary-General
of the United Nations and former Deputy Executive
Director of UNICEF

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that children and young people have a right to express their views and to be heard. In light of this, two young people were selected by their peers to represent the voice of the young people and deliver remarks.

Dr. Gautam spoke about the highlights of the discussion over the last two days and provided a brief overview of the consultations taking place among the GNRC regional groups that had been meeting to formulate work plans to carry forward the outcomes and commitment of the Forum. He explained that Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto helped establish the Global Network of Religions for Children with the aim of providing a forum for individuals

and organizations to harness the power and potential of the world's religions to promote and protect the rights of children. Rev. Miyamoto addressed the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002, where he proposed that the world needed to foster in children ethical and moral values through ethics education. Working closely with UNESCO, UNICEF and many other secular and religious organizations, a manual on ethics education was prepared and was launched at the GNRC Third Forum in Hiroshima, Japan. Furthermore, it was announced that the GNRC and UNICEF are currently collaborating with other religious and secular organizations to prepare a study on "Children in World Religions."

The idea of a Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions was also advanced at the Forum in commemoration of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November and in conjunction with Universal Children's Day. This recommendation for a Day of Prayer and Action for Children proposes that on or around 20 November, all places of religion around the world will be transformed into hubs for prayers and specific actions to help achieve the internationally-agreed upon child's rights and development goals for children such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). (See Appendix I for the full proposal.)

At the Third Forum, the GNRC and its partners went a step further by focusing attention on three challenges facing humanity today that have a direct impact on children: poverty, which deprives hundreds of millions of children from enjoying a decent standard of living; environmental degradation including climate change, which threatens human survival and the wellbeing of children; and violence against children, as victims of conflict, domestic violence and other forms of abuse that insult human dignity.

Remarks by the Honorable Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations



It is my great pleasure to be here at this Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, a forum that is dedicated to learning to share values that shape our common faith to a brighter future for our children and for the world. I should hasten to bring to you very warm regards from H.E. Secretary-General Ban, who wishes this Forum all the very best and productive deliberations. I want to thank all of the organizers, and through you, pay a special tribute to Reverend Miyamoto Senior, who, I understand, just recently celebrated his 91st birthday. It is a blessing that the Reverend's longevity allows him to continue his tireless efforts to help children around the world.

Nothing could be more meaningful for the future of the planet than ensuring prosperity and security for the next generation. We know from painful experience that if we neglect children, society as a whole will pay a higher price. But children who are loved, nourished, cared for and well-educated can bring about a better future. The United Nations is engaged in an important campaign to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, our blueprint for lifting people from extreme, dehumanizing poverty. If we can succeed, cut illiteracy, cure disease and alleviate malnutrition and poverty we will guarantee a better tomorrow. But this soaring vision will have to overcome a grim reality. The numbers are horrifying. One child dies every six seconds of hunger. Malaria kills two children each minute and during that time, somewhere in the world, another child dies of AIDS. The lack of clean water and sanitation takes the lives of a million and a half children each year and countless more die in conflicts they did not start and have no stake in continuing.

Still, we are not without hope. The United Nations is galvanizing partners from around the world to right these terrible wrongs. We are pressing governments to protect the world's children and we are not stopping there. We are also working with corporations, academics and non-governmental organizations in coordinated campaigns to safeguard the rights of children and get them off to a better start in life. To fulfill our sacred duty to nurture future generations we need more than policies and we need more than resources. We need a hands-on approach that makes a difference in the lives of individual children. This is where the Global Network and other initiatives come in.

Religious non-governmental organizations have been making a meaningful contribution to development for decades. Many have a global reach. They help raise awareness about the most pressing issues on the international agenda, like disarmament, economic integration and conflict resolution, always with a focus on human security. The contribution of religious NGOs to sustainable development often stems from a deep-rooted

doctrinal belief in the spiritual imperative of helping others. In general, they are self-motivated and altruistic, spontaneously contributing as best they can for the simple purpose of practicing compassion. What is more, we increasingly see partnerships being forged across religious lines as organizations representing different faiths join together to promote shared goals. In the process, they not only help resolve the problems they set out to address, they also generate greater understanding worldwide.

These can ultimately help foster a positive environment for children who the Convention on the Rights of the Child says, and I quote, “Should be brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.” Every contribution, large and small, is helping to realize this vision. If we can save even one infant from hunger, provide one toddler with proper shelter, teach one child how to read, and protect one youngster from war and poverty we can change more than the destiny of an individual—we can plant a seed of hope that will blossom in the future. If we live up to our promises to the millions and millions of children who need our help, they can take on the whole world as adults. Your work is part of this effort and I wish you all success for the sake of those who are still too young to help themselves, but who, with the right love and care, will someday be able to help others.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Remarks by Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF



It is my pleasure to be here today, and many thanks to all of you for so warmly receiving me. It is my honor to be sharing the podium today with the Deputy Secretary-General, a good friend and someone who is doing an outstanding job in the United Nations system, and her dedication and experience with children over the years is something that, for UNICEF, certainly helps to bring the issue of children to the forefront of the work that we are doing and the importance of children as the future of this world.

Many thanks to Reverend Miyamoto and the Global Network of Religions for Children for your kind introduction. Our thanks to the people of Hiroshima for so warmly receiving us, for hosting this wonderful event. And, of course, it is a great pleasure for me to share this podium today with Kul Gautam who, as he told you, was one of our Deputy Executive Directors at UNICEF. He served for 34 years in UNICEF and, as I am sure you have heard during this conference, he is passionate about children and committed to making a difference in their lives.

We are also very pleased that there are many young people here today. I just had an opportunity to meet many of them, to have a photo taken with them. It is so important, as Kul pointed out, that they have a chance to make their voices heard because this is the world which they will inherit. UNICEF strongly supports involvement of young people in various forums. In fact, UNICEF was one of the founding organizations of what is called the Junior 8, which is a group of young people, including those from Japan, that go every year to the G8 Summit. When the G8 Summit is hosted here in July in Japan there will be a corollary J8 of young people that Japan will host as well, an important forum, now, in the last four years, providing input into the G8 Summit of the most powerful leaders in the world. UNICEF is proud to be a part of that, and Kul was one of the driving forces behind getting that going within our UNICEF family.

We are also so pleased to be working with the Global Network of Religions for Children. We have worked with them, as UNICEF, since their inception in the year 2000. That was the same year, of course, that world leaders, from all around the world, came together to agree upon the Millennium Development Goals. They agreed to achieve, by 2015, measurable achievements in the most critical areas of human development. As Kul said, we like to say, because we know that children are at the heart of these Millennium Development Goals. They include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; gender equality; reducing child and maternal mortality; and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Human progress requires investing in children—in their education, in their healthcare and in their protection from abuse and exploitation. The 2015 deadline is fast approaching and efforts need to be made to ensure that we can scale up to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

What is it going to take to reach these goals? We know that if you look at one of the measures, that is, child mortality, 50% of the nearly 10 million children who die every year are on the African continent. But 40% of the children who die every year are in Asia. And so it is in

Asia, where we are today, and in Africa that we have to focus our efforts if we are going to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The religious leaders and faith-based groups have the moral standing and influence to instill a sense of global solidarity to help bring about positive change. Religious leaders can help deliver messages that help children, their families, their communities, that impact on positive and constructive change in people's lives. Religious leaders can communicate the critical importance of education for not just boys, but also for girls. They can address harmful and traditional practices. Let us take a couple of examples. One is female genital cutting, one of the most deplorable but culturally widespread traditions that young girls face, and it is something we have a moral obligation to protect young girls from.

Another traditional practice is early marriage, something that is widely practiced in many parts of Asia. Those who marry early are less able to protect themselves from HIV, they are more likely to be victims of violence within marriage and to bear children at ages that put their own health at risk. We are not talking about 17-year-olds, we are talking about girls as young as 9 and 10 and 11-years-old. This too, is a traditional practice that we can come together as the world and the religious leaders can play a role to eliminate this practice of early marriage.

I was recently in Sierra Leone earlier this year. This is the country with the highest rate of under-five mortality in the entire world, at 270 per 1,000 live births. That means you have a greater than one-in-four chance of dying if you are born in Sierra Leone. One of the things that I learned when I was there is that only about 10% of women actually breastfeed their babies. This is one of the most protective things that you can do to save children's lives. And so, knowing that the country is very poor, and I did not think that they could afford baby formula, I said, "What do they feed the children?" I was told they feed them "rice water." Rice water, instead of nutritious breast milk. So it occurred to me as I prepared for this today, suppose all the religious leaders in Sierra Leone came together and gave all of their parishioners, no matter what faith they may be, the same message: How important it is to breastfeed your children so that we can save lives and make a difference in the child mortality rates of Sierra Leone.

I know that protection of children is one of the themes of this conference and violence against children is widespread throughout the world, something that all of us have an obligation to address and I think particularly the religious community and religious leaders can make a real difference in helping to educate, to advocate and



to help people understand how important it is to give children their right not to be the subjects of violence.

Religious institutions dot landscapes from the smallest village to the largest city. In places where schools and health clinics may be scarce, chances are that there are houses of worship. Now, these are not only spiritual gathering points, but they can be real structures that can be used for the wellbeing of children and their communities. Religious institutions can be used as distribution centers for life-saving interventions such as vaccines, bed nets or anti-retroviral drugs to combat AIDS. Religious institutions can also be used as gathering points to educate communities about how to best prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, the importance of clean water, basic sanitation and good hygiene. They can play a very important role in addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS and many religious institutions, those community-based institutions, are the ones that help care for the 15 million children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In Ethiopia, for example, religious leaders from multiple faiths came together and they are educating young people on HIV prevention and on the importance of caring for those with HIV and AIDS. In countries in the Mekong region in Asia, UNICEF has worked closely with the Buddhist monks to help those affected with HIV and AIDS.

Houses of worship can also serve as meeting points for youths where they can socialize, where they can learn skills; computers, music, arts, discuss issues that are important to them. I had an opportunity when I was in Tanzania a couple of years ago to meet with youth who were part of a youth group. One of things I said was, "What is it that you would like?" These were youth that did not have enough opportunity at that time for young people to go to secondary school. That is improving now in Tanzania, but these youths, they said, "We would like a place to meet." And yet, everywhere I went I saw all these religious institutions that were, basically, nothing going on during the week. Why not meet in one of those? So, I think that religious institutions can open up their doors and serve as

youth centers to build meeting points for young people, to help young men and women stay away from the dangers of the street. To provide them with safe and supportive settings where they can meet, learn, socialize, and help to address some of the issues that we face today.

So many of you serve on the front lines in your communities assisting the sick, the poor and the most vulnerable. Your efforts are helping to translate the Millennium Development Goals into priorities for communities and motivating people in governments for taking action for children. The visionary work of the Global Network of Religions for Children is helping to mobilize the world's major faith and secular traditions to act together, with and for children, to unite for children through inter-faith cooperation. And we certainly welcome and are happy to be a partner in the ethics education resource, *Learning to Live Together*, the book that was published and introduced at the first day of this session.

Far too often crimes are committed, hatred is spread, injustice is justified, and intolerance is tolerated in the name of religion. Throughout my travels I have met with many women and children whose lives have been impacted by violence, abuse and injustice. Children who were malnourished, women who watched their children die because of diseases that could have been prevented, or boys and girls that are left orphaned by HIV and AIDS. Let us all keep them in our minds and in our hearts and work collectively to save and improve the lives of the millions of children around the world who need us.

Thank you very much, arigatou.

Remarks by Ms. Anam Wasey



Good afternoon. I am Anam. I am from India. I will present the outcomes of the three meetings and the discussions by 12 of my friends who took part in the Forum as panelists. So now, along with them, I am here to talk to you about that.

Poverty occurs; violence, a reality which needs to be changed; and environment, a gift which isn't valued anymore—three main issues which are very, very

significant. All of us came together and thought of ways of how we could help in eradicating poverty, countering violence and protecting the environment. So first, we will start with poverty.

For poverty, we discussed the practices that are leading to it. The most important out of them were: lack of education, lack of resources, unemployment and corruption, etc. The solution that came out to be was that education is the key to eradicate poverty. Education leads to human development and awareness, too.

Then we come to violence. Violence is the most unfortunate thing existing in the world today. Violence against children is quite common, and we can see it in many cases. For example, child mortality under which we can talk about female feticide; child labor under which we can talk about children forcibly working in households and factories. The solutions that came up were peace, dignity and unity. For this, I would like to quote the words of Mahatma Ghandi: "If you want to change the world, change yourself because you are the world."

Environment. When we hear this word, the first thing that comes to my mind is life. Indeed, we are surviving because environment is still present around us. But do you think it will exist if this will be the way of exploiting and overusing it? We don't think so. The world will perish without environment. What we thought about this is that if we work together in harmony, peace and love nature, then there will a light of hope that the world will flourish and cherish. So now we know that we pollute to perish, and we conserve to flourish.

We, the people in South Asia, are working together and we have seen a lot of progress in that. In 100 days, we had 1,000 activities which have brought together more than 10,000 children. And now we are working on how we can bring about a positive change in this world. I would like to conclude by saying that as follow-up to the discussions we had here, it is time to bring ourselves into action and try to solve these major, major issues. We would like to thank the GNRC and Arigatou Foundation for organizing such a great and lovely event for us. It has been a privilege and honor for us to come in front of all you wonderful people here and convey our message of peace.

Arigatou gozaimasu.

Remarks by Mr. Isaac Lukumayi Peter



Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and friends. My name is Isaac Peter and I am from Tanzania. I have prepared some words I want to share with you. GNRC is a good thing which has brought us here. For me, the GNRC is the thing which has made my life better. In Tanzania we have Peace Clubs where youth can make friendship when they meet and talk about peace. They put me in a school, they provide me with shelter, I meet good people and friends, and we get inspired to create the Peace Club in Tanzania because we were given an opportunity.

I have also met people who have been examples for me. I have had an opportunity to participate in the religion conference, and I am happy that I am now here. In the streets, there is violence. The children are doing hard work in order to get money and food. The police beat them because they don't want to see them on the streets. But, how can we help them? Poverty. Poverty is a big issue in my country and all over the world. Many children are dying because of hunger, diseases like malaria, and HIV/AIDS, so we are here to help solve those problems. [inaudible] is the source of human beings, but today, the children are living in a bad environment. The street children sleep on the street with rubbish. But how can we solve this problem?

Developing countries produce bombs. Please, stop producing bombs. Produce more food. I think we will, we can, we must, stop poverty and violence and protect our environment. If we want to change our world, we must start with ourselves.

Next, a question was posed to Ms. Veneman by a Japanese schoolteacher in Hiroshima: because of its tragic experience, Hiroshima is now deeply committed to peace, with a long history of peace education. How best can the importance of peace be inculcated in the minds of young people? How can education contribute to bringing peace and solidarity to the world? Ms. Veneman commended the city of Hiroshima on the breadth of public information

available. She advised that all institutions should play a role in working with youth to teach tolerance, understanding, and the value of working toward the better good. UNICEF is also deeply involved in the social reintegration and rehabilitation of former child combatants where again education plays a pivotal role.

Ms. Migiro was asked for her reflections on ways to involve young people on the issue of climate change and global warming. She responded that climate change is a serious threat to development, particularly in the least developed countries. In fact, the adverse effects of climate change pose the risk of undermining whatever gains have been made or could be made in the context of the MDGs. Children often suffer the most as a result of climate change, whether it be from drought or flood, or food and water shortages.

Issues related to climate change and the environment are generational issues. Climate change presents opportunities to strengthen cooperation, to change lives, and to ensure the realization of sustainable development goals. The science has already spoken; the effects of climate change are man-made. This conclusion predicates a responsibility to educate the youth at a very early age on the principles of environmental conservation. Adults have an inherent responsibility for ensuring the safety and sustainability of the earth for future generations.

Poverty and hunger are categorically linked with environmental degradation: water scarcity, breakout of diseases, and so on. Religions can be used to bring together communities—especially children—to address issues that threaten the very existence of humanity.

Remarks by Ms. Rama Ndao Diouf, Special Advisor to H.E. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal



I am very honored to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of my country, Senegal, at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children in your beautiful city of Hiroshima. You see me honored as a special consul of the president. I am in front of you to represent the President of the Republic of Senegal who was invited to participate. Knowing the commitment of the president towards the children and inter-religious dialogue, you wish to have him among you; unfortunately he could not come. I present you with sincere gratitude for that.

Senegal congratulates you to hold your Third Forum around the theme of “Learning to Share—Values, Action, Hope.” This Forum comes to complete the commemorative high-level talks from the Special Session of the Children on the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your initiative is great because the challenges facing the world affect all the levels of the population, particularly the most vulnerable ones, and children are amongst them. Senegal, through its president, Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, next to other nations, was committed to implement the action in a World Fit for Children. So let me share with you some of the breakthroughs that my country has made.

Although economic resources are very weak, Senegal promotes the rights of children at the center of its protection of vulnerable levels of society. The Chief of State gives an importance to children and in this sense, implicated religious communities and public sector in the promotion of the rights of children. In each priority in the Declaration of a World Fit for Children, my country, Senegal, strives according to its commitment to bring solutions, to bring each child a quality education, and protect them against bad treatment and fight against AIDS. For this, more jury legal reforms to fight against violence against children, early marriage and feminine mutilation. Senegal took some action to improve this vulnerable part of the population, to protect their rights. And with this report, policies started with Senegal based on census information, improved significantly the civil registry of the children – 78% in 2004. This approach of the Senegal Government helped to reduce the [inaudible] of young girls, and has been approved by Senegal law.

In other areas, such as the fight against work and children, Senegal has made breakthrough and consolidates them with the help of different strategic partners and through different programs and projects, partnership with the Association of Children of the Street, fight against child work, and national documents. This progress was made through the enforcement of school structures and creation of a national agency. So this could help all the children and Senegal made a great leap toward education for all. The advancement

was made through a holistic policy around partnership with different sectors of society and religious leaders, particularly on the dialogue between Christian and Islam. So this association was a key point of this implementation and we could obtain important results, although there are many improvements to do still.

As you know, Senegal is a Muslim culture—95% and 5% Christian—but they co-exist in perfect harmony which is appreciated elsewhere in the world. The best example that can be given is that Senegal was ruled by a Christian and was elected democratically during 25 years. Inter-faith dialogue is part of our society and our culture. Religions are actors of our society and its strategic partners in the promotion of the rights of children. Senegal is a defender of dialogue—Christianity and Islam could not avoid such an event. All together—Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, atheists—we can act to change the future of our children so that they can grow up in a safer world, more tolerant, with new values without violence and in a better environment.

To end, I would like to thank again the Arigatou Foundation and the Japanese people for their exceptional welcome. Senegal is part of the GNRC and wants to start working for the promotion and the expansion of the GNRC. Thank you very much for your attention.

**Remarks by Prof. Susumu Shimazono,
Department of Religious Studies, Graduate
School of Humanities and Sociology, The
University of Tokyo**



As a Japanese citizen, I am very, very pleased that this important conference is being held here in Japan, especially Hiroshima. And I would express my great thanks with my fellow Japanese country-people to the people who have come from all over the world, especially Anam, Isaac and the young people. Thank you very much. I would also like to express my thanks to Arigatou Foundation and I am a little bit proud too that a Japanese organization is helping this kind of very important global activity.

We have received some questions. Probably those who are here have learned already and have been thinking about what we can possibly do. I am thinking, too. Living in Japan precludes us from understanding the issues of overseas countries, including Asian countries. But if we are to think about such issues, then I think we first have to think about what the children of Japan can do to begin with. We are viewing more and more people in poverty actually in the past 10 years. But as compared to the average condition in the world, Japan probably has a better condition.

Many people come and visit Hiroshima, and then they are surprised as to how beautifully reconstructed the city is, and the conference is being well organized and proceeded very efficiently. And yet, the very important question we have to ask ourselves is: are Japanese children really happy? I am sure, for the Japanese audience, that this question is very close to the heart for both adults and children. Some person said that children around the world are being driven to study hard in schools because schools are competitive grounds. Bullying exists also and it seems as if this is not just a situation in Japan but in other advanced or industrialized countries.

At college, I ask my students... 70-80 percent of my own students have thought about committing suicide at some point in their lives. After all the economic development and satisfaction of materialistic needs, doing things, many gains available, and yet children are not necessarily happy. They are oftentimes very lonely. I came today and had a chance to look into this Central Asia regional session and they were discussing that the most important issue is poverty in love; poverty of love. This may apply to Japanese children's condition. In other words, it is a failure of adults to really convey adult's passion and thoughts on how we want our children to inherit the future of the earth. So, GNRC's activities take up the issues of children all around the world, but children in advanced countries are also suffering; that is something which we have to keep in our minds when we try to understand the inter-related nature of the issues and problems of children around the world. It is like an ecological system which is all tied to each other. If something happens in New York City, and then South Africa, India, they are all somehow related. Something which happens in the minds of Japanese children is not unrelated; instead they are related to the things which are happening with the children of Africa. So, we must learn from each other, we must learn from people coming from all over the world, so that our network expands and I think it is a big responsibility and challenge for the leaders and the people of religions of Japan to realize

wholesome, happy society of Japan for the children who are living today as well as for the future generations.

Remarks by Ven. Gijun Sugitani, former President, Tendai Buddhist Denomination



I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all of you for giving me this opportunity to speak here today. I have been listening to the remarks made concerning the happiness of children, and I realize that there is both a great responsibility on the part of the people of religion, particularly religious leaders, to promote the welfare and wellbeing of children, and I am a part of that circle.

With respect to children, our religion always places high emphasis on the value of the child. We have a special way of worshipping in six directions; that means four directions—north, south, east and west—and the Heavens and the ground. First, you face the east and pay tribute to your parents; then you face the west and thank your wife and children; you face the south and you thank your Master who taught you; and face the north and thank friends and society. Then you face the Heavens and thank God and the Divine and the Great. And you face the ground and you thank your subordinates, and depending on the country, you thank all the material things which support us.

So your own being or existence is supported or sustained by so many things, including your wife, your parents and your children. You have to pay tribute; you have to thank all these other beings. It is different from just trying very hard to make efficient the workings of your organization or to view in this complex, your children in a more utilitarian way, which is wrong. At the same time, if you look back at history, in industrialized countries consumption is considered to be a virtue. Consuming things is considered to be wonderful because they create further economic development. However, we have come to a great turning point. This virtue was asserted by the economist Patton. In the United States, Protestantism was very important value so many people first thought this was a ridiculous idea.

However sooner or later, people were enticed by this idea of consumption being a virtue, which then was imported to Japan because Japanese society had a tacit agreement that consumption is not a good value, but instead saving is a good value. But yet again we were impacted. A Nobel Prize Laureate has taught us how important this concept of mottainai is, meaning how precious things are. Again we have a hard time realizing and controlling our worldly desire. All of these things I have been feeling when I have been listening to others. Anam suggested that education is important, but once we have education and once fine ideas are inculcated among children's mind, and then yet, if you look at adults, those adults are betraying those values which they had wanted to inculcate among children. And children face breakdowns so we have to realize that we must fulfill our own goals by being faithful to the objectives that we had set.

In another context, the United Nations system—UNICEF included—are doing very useful work so that we have more hopes and light in the future of children of the world. On the other hand, if you take a look at the standing members of the United Nations, the largest countries, producers of arms and then exporters of arms, are again betraying those teachings and our goals. So I suggest there is a tremendous need for those countries to become aware of what they are doing, reflect upon themselves, and try to correct themselves. We are unable to live by ourselves. We are unable to live alone, so we are living and existing on the cobweb of the inter-relatedness—invisible perhaps—relations, but we are again influencing this inter-related relationship. So we have to always be aware of this and we have to be service-minded for the future of the children. As Prof. Shimazono indicated, most of the Japanese children are materially satisfied and yet because of the abundance and richness of materials, perhaps their hearts and minds are destroyed or undermined with respect to have passion and be good and be kind to other children of the world. You have to realize that you have to have a greater imagination. That your own being, your own existence today, may be based upon the existence of other human beings, children, adults who have suffered so much in their lives, and because of that you are here.

In many schools we have a UNICEF donation box—charity boxes. And United Nations activities are permeating so many corners of society today and if we continue this in other Asian countries, then also we can perhaps guide ourselves and gradually but surely, create better conditions for children in Asia, Africa and in other parts of the world. Hope must be maintained. Thank you.

Remarks by Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General, World Conference of Religions for Peace



First of all, let me just say how proud Religions for Peace is to be a partner with the GNRC. We feel this is one of the most wonderful partnerships that we can imagine. In many ways, we feel we are all really one big family when we look at GNRC and the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Like all of us, I was moved by you, Anam and Isaac, and I want to make my brief remarks begin with a story. It is a true story and it is really a story about the tremendous power young religious leaders have, young people have, to be real agents of change, to be real healers in our world. Now we can all remember that just a few months ago, in what is really a magnificent country, Kenya, there was tremendous turmoil. An election was contested and violence broke out and these magnificent people—the Kenyans—found themselves in the grips of tremendous violence that moved across tribal lines. That dominated our headlines. What didn't make our headlines was what the religious youth were doing. They had mobilized, at the very moments of that conflict. They were members of all tribes and they were members of all religious groups. They moved directly into the neighborhoods, often slums, where people were being killed in mob actions. They engaged in conflict resolution, they moved into areas that could have erupted in flames and didn't. And they did something else that touches me and reminds me of your brilliant interventions. These were young people and they knew who actually had been incited to kill people: they were other young people. Long before governments or partners of governments could get to the scene, the youth were on the spot and they were talking to each other, and believe me, the toll—which was large—would have been immensely greater had not the religious youth already been organized in networks of cooperation. So I know, Anam and Isaac, you represented your entire group here and you spoke with conviction and powerful modesty, but you are members of young people who are agents of change, and you need

to be at the center of multi-religious cooperation. GNRC welcomes you there and so does Religions for Peace, so we are very grateful that you are here.

Very quickly, there have been so many observations made and I would like just to build upon them. First of all, I think all of the work that we have been doing here—on violence, on poverty and Earth—make it abundantly clear that this isn't other people's problems; these are our problems and that each of us needs to be a complete stakeholder, an agent of change, and that in fact—and here is the word that we come to—we have recognized that we need a multi-stakeholder approach. And so Madame Veneman, you are here representing the United Nations here with the religious sector, just as an illustration of the need we all have to have a multi-stakeholder approach. And it is here that we have to raise the question to ourselves: what is it uniquely that our religious communities can do? What can we do? And Ms. Veneman, I am going to continue to use your own remarks as the example. In your remarks, you illustrated two of the exquisite assets the religious communities have. You talked about how every mosque, every church, every temple can be a center of delivery. In fact, I had the pleasure of bringing two extraordinary religious leaders to join with you, Ms. Veneman, on the very first week of your assuming leadership in UNICEF, and you made it not only brilliantly clear, but with such generosity and warmth, that you were going to take your leadership as a leadership of partnership. And I further recall your being in Uganda, and being with Sheikh Mubaje, the Grand Mufti in Uganda, and your speaking out to Government and to all sectors of society and making it very clear that in your view, the children of Uganda themselves would not be reached unless every mosque and every church, every temple and every synagogue was engaged as part of that outreach. And you identified, I think in the most concrete way, this practical social asset that the religious communities have. Every temple can be a platform for delivery.



Others here have talked about what we could call the “moral assets” of religion. Not something to take lightly—

the moral assets. Who else has been in a continuous conversation about what it means to be a human being, about what it means to be in community? One way of understanding our moral traditions in religious communities is that they are precisely that: they are an extended conversation across time, ever fresh, confronting new problems about what it means really to be a human being and really to be in community, one with the other.

So these are two exquisite assets: the social asset and the moral asset. I would like to mention a third. Shimazono sensei, you were, I think approaching this third asset. And we don't have a perfect word for every tradition, but I think the best we can do in English is spirituality. Religions each have what for them is most central, which is spirituality. It infuses that moral discourse, it is present as the animating pulse at all of those social infrastructures, but it is not reducible to either of those two. And here I think we need to recognize and claim that as the religious communities, we have to take this most precious asset and capture its socially transformative power.

I have had the privilege of being with people in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, in situations of violent conflict where unspeakably bad things do happen. And in situations of irresponsible, it-shouldn't-be extreme poverty; but it is. And what you find is something remarkable—and this is not to romanticize conditions that we need to change—but what you find is that people bear the unbearable. How did they do it? People find hope when there are no apparent grounds for hope. How did they do that? And people forgive the unforgivable. They simply do. How do they do it? Well, the religious communities each understand that strange dimension of the human heart. In fact, they are the great schools of that dimension of the human heart. I have only expressed it in its negative manifestations when difficulties are so extreme.

We think about our host, the Arigatou Foundation, and about Myochikai, the religious community. They weren't just engaging their moral concerns when they all worked so hard to bring us here. There was a sense of spirituality. Here in Japan, a number of the Japanese religious communities have adopted a tradition. Donate one meal, give up one meal. I have been in Iraq, for example, just two weeks after the occupation of Baghdad with Japanese “Donate One Meal” money to help Iraqi religious communities. So it is this exquisite dimension of spirituality—Professor, I think you were in your own way, really referring to that dimension.

Finally, I think when we look at our religious traditions we see that we are impelled to face these three great problems that are the focus of our being convened here. But there is something more: we are not just problem solvers.

At the deepest heart of Buddhism, at the depth of Shinto, of Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism, there is a positive notion of what it would mean to be a human being and what it would mean to be a good and harmonious society. So, I think today we face an extraordinary opportunity. The burden is on us as religious persons. How are we going to translate for the public, this positive vision of what we think the human being is, and what she and he are called to be in community. Here in Japan there was a brilliant step forward and it was the articulation of a notion of shared security; a vision under which we can grasp the wellbeing of children, the wellbeing of our planet and the need to overcome poverty. Very simply speaking, your security is my security. Today none of us can build a wall high enough to separate ourselves from the injury, suffering or vulnerability of the other. Today we might say we live in a common lifeboat. Practically we know we won't make it unless we work together and you can hear this kind of practical argument being advanced. We simply all have to work together if we are going to make it. Interesting. It mirrors a deeper logic that has been present from the very beginning of our religious communities and that is the moral argument that we have to do that, we have to work together if we are going to retain what it really means to be a person. So I think at the time of this extraordinary gathering of GNRC, we are at the point where the practical reasons for cooperation align and match up with the deepest religious and moral reasons for cooperation. We have to cooperate if we are going to survive, and we must cooperate if we are going to retain our humanity. And GNRC is a great example of a step in the right direction. Thank you.

Following these remarks, questions from the audience were fielded, including a written submission concerning the problems plaguing young people due to drug abuse. The question inquired how religious leaders can help address this problem and specifically requested the reflections of the panelists on the legalization of drugs to soften the effects of illegal drug trafficking. Dr. Vendley stated that it was important to examine what it is about daily life in many societies that makes the allure of intoxication so attractive. He added that in every nation state, there would be a great deal of local wisdom that would need to be brought to bear concerning the legalization of drugs. It could be that the culture created by the criminalization of certain drugs may, in some cases, do more harm than good, but beyond that generalization Dr. Vendley concluded that it was difficult to comment on the issue.

Building on Dr. Vendley's comments, Ms. Veneman commented on the role of religious organizations in providing a networked environment for young people, and a strong sense of spirituality to give children an alternative to drugs. She drew attention to those who prey on children to get them addicted to drugs and emphasized the importance of education to teach these young children right from wrong.

An audience member from Israel asked the panelists for their thoughts on ways to move beyond the tense relations between Israelis and Palestinians and added that Hiroshima was extremely inspiring to her. Prof. Shimazono likened the situation to the often-strained relations among East Asian countries and proposed the promotion of increased opportunities for exchange, citing Japan's joint-hosting of the World Cup with the Republic of Korea.

The final question was a call for the engagement of civil society across all United Nations agencies. Faith-based organizations are the main players of civil society because they reach right to the grassroots level, to the heart of the family. As such, religious organizations should be involved in all UN discussions as they are directly connected to the people. In turn, Ms. Veneman stressed the need for joint responsibility on the part of the faith-based organizations coming together with UN country teams and others to have a common understanding of how to best work together at the country level.

CLOSING SESSION

Adoption of Outcome Document



Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko of the World Council of Churches, chair of the drafting committee, explained how the committee had incorporated participants' input into the final draft of the Declaration, and read it aloud to the plenary. The plenary formally adopted the Declaration with a vigorous round of applause. (See pages 69-70 for

the Hiroshima Declaration of the Global Network of Religions for Children.)

Closing Remarks by Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, Representative of the Arigatou Foundation and Chairman of the Board of Myochikai



First of all, on behalf of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the presence of all the participants that came from all over the world, enabling us to hold the Third Forum of the GNRC here in Hiroshima. In particular, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude once more for the outstanding support of UNESCO and UNICEF for this forum from the early stages of the preparations, and for the presence here with us of Hon. Asha-Rose Migirom, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the UNICEF.

At this Forum, we were able to enthusiastically discuss how religious people should tackle such crucial problems surrounding children as poverty, violence and the environment for three days. We have just adopted the Hiroshima Declaration, expressing the outcome of three days of deliberations. In it, we declare that the GNRC will promote “A Day of Prayer and Action for Children” as a new initiative. The main objective of the GNRC is, after all, “Prayer and Action.” We would be very grateful if all of you would support this initiative in order to make it a broad movement of global citizens for children with the support of religious leaders, UN agencies and many others.

Thanks to the support of many people, the GNRC has now marked the 8th anniversary of its founding with the successful conclusion of the Third Forum. In 2002, we made a commitment to the international community to establish the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children, pledging ourselves to promoting ethics education. Now, at this forum, we have seen the first major tangible outcome of this pledge. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all those related to the council for their untiring efforts and support. The council has finished its four-year term, and in this sense, we think

that the GNRC has reached a milestone. Therefore, moving into a new phase for the GNRC, we would like to reshape the GNRC and further extend its network.

In order to do so, we will strengthen the activities of the regional networks and will consider holding forums in the regions, as appropriate to the situation of each region. And we will make specific contributions ourselves to the promotion of ethics education and the action plans adopted at this forum in cooperation with UN agencies at the local, regional and global levels. We are determined to promote the ethics education initiative at this time, and we will cooperate not only with UN agencies but also with the economic world to promote it, further extending the reach of our interfaith network.

The GNRC is one of the Arigatou Foundation’s interfaith cooperation programs, and the Arigatou Foundation will continue to support the GNRC’s humanitarian activities through Arigatou International, based in Geneva, Switzerland, making the GNRC the main interfaith cooperation program of the Foundation. We have designed a new logo as one symbol of the reshaping of the GNRC and the Arigatou Foundation. As you can see in the document distributed, the new logo is designed in the shape of the Chinese character for “heart.” Now I would like to show you the logo on the screen.

In the book entitled “Ningen No Daichi: Human Land” written by Ms. Michiko Inukai, a critic on civilization, there is a story about a young volunteer’s encounter with a child in a refugee camp in Thailand. There was a child who had lost the will to live, whose hands and legs were skeleton thin. Probably, this child’s parents, brothers and sisters had all died or been separated from him. He never spoke a word, and kept staring silently at the sky, doing nothing but waiting to die, refusing all food and drink. This is when the young volunteer found him. He embraced this refugee child for 2 straight days, with only a few toilet breaks. Finally, on the third day, the child began to respond... he started to smile. In her book, Ms. Inukai writes about that scene as follows:

“This child discovered that there was a person who made much of him and that he was never a valueless person to anyone. This consciousness and recognition opened his expressionless face and heart, which had been closed like a stone.”

I believe that the heart this young volunteer had for the child should be the spirit of the Arigatou Foundation and that of the GNRC.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Hon. Ambassador Samuel Koo and all the members of the Forum Organizing Committee who devoted themselves to the realization of this Forum. And I would

also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the GNRC coordinators, who have supported the development of the GNRC in each region of the world. Thank you very much.

I stand here alone as Representative of the Arigatou Foundation, but I certainly did not put on this Forum by myself. To everyone on the staff, the volunteers, everyone who worked so hard... I am so grateful. Most of all, I am grateful to the one who allowed me to be involved in this, who permitted it all to happen, my father, Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, Leader of Myochikai. Thank you very much. And I deeply appreciate my mother, without whose support and care I would not be here today.

Thank you so much, everyone, for coming to this forum. Thank you so very much. That is all I can say! Thank you. I am looking forward to seeing you all again. Thank you very much for listening.

INTERFAITH PRAYER FOR PEACE

Masters of Ceremony: Rev. Keiji Kunitomi and Ms. Agneta Ucko

Introductory Remarks

**Most Rev. Josiah Fearon, Bishop of Kaduna,
Church of Nigeria**



Most Rev. Fearon stated that, although we come from various religions and cultures, humankind shares a single origin. The Catholic religion calls this creator, God the Almighty, the Blessed Trinity. God has made humankind for Himself, and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Him. Rousseau begins Emile with a pronouncement that Man was born free, but is everywhere in chains. Jesus Christ taught His Divine Kingdom through parables. And George Herbert likened Man to a pulley, ever drawing back to God. All of these beliefs underline that God is our goal and without Him, there is no meaning. Therefore prayer infuses meaning into life. Prayer reminds us of who we are; prayer allows us to seek and receive guidance. True prayer lifts Man above problems, but does not hide his sins. In closing, Bishop Idowu-Fearon called for a renewed pledge of solidarity, among believers of all faiths, to be the hands of God and the champions of rights for children around the world.

Prayers by Representatives of the Religions

Prayers were offered by the following representatives of the various religions.

Baha'i

Mr. Omid Makhani
Ms. Tarasieh Werle-Vahdat



Buddhism

Rev. Bunryu Akiyoshi
Rev. Gensho Hozumi
Rev. Nisshin Matsushita
Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne



Christianity

Most Rev. Method Paul Kilaini
Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega
Rev. Dr. Qais Sadiq



Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan

Rev. Tsunehito Tanaka
Rev. Tetsuro Eguchi
Rev. Jiko Sato
Rev. Koichi Matsumoto



Hinduism

Mr. Dadhi Ram Khanal

Islam

Seyed Mohammed Ali Abtahi
Ms. Bedria Mohammed Ahmed

Judaism

Ms. Dalia Landau
Ms. Marlene Silbert

Sectarian Shinto

Most Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake
Rev. Kunihiko Shimamoto
Rev. Fumio Shishino

Shrine Shinto

Rev. Sadataka Shimoyamada
Rev. Akihiko Tamaki
Rev. Moriyasu Ito

Sikhism

Ms. Charanjit AjitSingh
Mr. Ajit Singh



WALKING PLEDGE TO PEACE

Participants were then invited to walk to the Cenotaph for Atomic Bomb Victims and to offer prayers for the victims and renew their commitment to peace. Some 1,300 participants left the hall and walked in a grand procession to offer prayers at the Cenotaph, bringing the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children to a profound and magnificent close.



GNRC Third Forum

**Outcome Document: The Hiroshima Declaration,
Thematic Recommendations,
Regional Reports and Action Priorities for 2008-2012**

The Hiroshima Declaration of the Global Network of Religions for Children

“I am afraid of a childless world.”

— From a Persian poem

We, religious leaders, people of different faiths, activists, professionals, educators, youth and children from 63 countries, gathered from 24 to 26 May 2008 at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC). At the invitation of the Arigatou Foundation, we met in Hiroshima, a city that rose out of the ashes to become a city dedicated to world peace. We thought it particularly fitting that representatives of the United Nations joined us in this place for this Forum.

Our purpose was to: reflect on our origins and accomplishments, renew our commitment to the world’s children, strengthen and expand our network to better meet the needs of children, and promote our shared values to instill hope for peace on earth and empower children to realize their potential for participation and leadership.

In doing so, we affirmed the mission of the GNRC: to offer a faith-based contribution to the realization of every child’s right to attain physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development as recognized in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Acknowledging the wounds of history and healing painful memories must be a goal at every interreligious gathering. In encountering one another and sharing our stories, we began to build bridges. Together, in our common desire to improve the conditions of children around the world, we discovered new bonds of trust and new potential for joint action.

Three ethical imperatives guided our deliberations:

- *to end violence against children*

Therefore, we pledge to prevent violence against children in our families, in our learning institutions, in our communities, and in our nations. In a world of plurality, we call on all religious and spiritual communities to recognize that no religion is an island. We must work together to overcome the root causes of violence, especially wherever religious traditions are used to justify it. Our religious education must champion non-violence and enable children to accept and respect others, fostering harmonious co-existence among all peoples.

- *to ensure that no child lives in poverty*

Therefore, we pledge to go beyond conventional economic approaches to addressing poverty, realizing that development does not automatically alleviate poverty. In a complex world of vast injustice and the growing challenges of globalization, our economies must be reconsidered and reconstructed on the basis of ethics and good governance: we call for a dialogue of conscience to increase empathy, promote just structures, and make governments responsible to their people. We affirm that children and youth have the potential to transform their communities and the world.

- *to protect the earth*

Therefore, we pledge to respond to nature’s cries with urgent action, recognizing that we are borrowing from future generations. No one is exempt from the duty to respect the earth. We believe that the earth can regenerate and restore itself, if we change our behavior and habits. We call on all people of faith to better appreciate who we are and our role within the universe, drawing from our religious traditions—their stories and values—to practice trusteeship in a sustainable “earth community.”

We recognize that innovative tools are critically needed to address these complex challenges in our world today. In response, over the past four years, we have developed, tested and launched an intercultural and interfaith programme for ethics education titled *Learning to Live Together*. By nurturing ethical awareness and promoting the common values of respect, empathy, responsibility and reconciliation, we believe this program will empower young people to respond to the threats of violence, poverty and environmental destruction.

Cognizant of the priorities for action in the regional groups developed here, we urge all of our GNRC regional networks, other faith-based organizations and NGO partners, the media, and educational institutions to work together to implement *Learning to Live Together* around the world. We appreciate the presence with us here in Hiroshima of representatives from UNESCO and UNICEF, as well as their commitment to further this work.

As people of different faiths and religious traditions, we propose that “A Day of Prayer and Action for Children” be held every year on 20 November, the International Children’s Day. We therefore call on people of all of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions to join us as we express our gratefulness for children and rededicate ourselves to children on this day each year, and together with relevant government, non-governmental and community-based organizations and other stakeholders, take action with and for children.

The call to pray, meditate, worship, and contemplate is at the heart and soul of all religious and spiritual traditions. There is a hope and vision reflected in prayer that people of every faith embrace and share. The call for prayer for children brings together our shared anguish at the suffering of children, and offers our collective hope for their dignity and integrity. And we recognize that with every prayer comes a new commitment to action.

Honoring the spirit of the Arigatou Foundation, we recommit ourselves to “prayer and practice” to implement these pledges as we go forth from the Third Forum in Hiroshima.

* The following recommendations from three thematic groups and action plans from seven regions are an integral part of this declaration.

Recommendations from Thematic Group Sessions on “The Ethical Imperative to Ensure that No Child Lives in Poverty”

- Promoting ethics as a tool to eradicate poverty
- Drawing on religious teachings and heritage to address poverty
- Putting children first in human development

Recommendations Adopted by Entire Group

1. Sharing not only at international level but also at grassroots level. Initiate local and regional meetings on poverty, violence and environment in order to promote local action. Local religious leaders must be encouraged to engage themselves in these discussions. Collaboration with other stakeholders such as companies, NGOs and UN agencies that have programmes already in place to support basic needs of children
2. Since corruption on all levels is one of the causes of poverty
 - i. Ethics education is imperative
 - ii. Addressing law enforcement
 - iii. Raising the awareness of politicians
3. Advocate family values through parental education including ethics, health and environment, etc.
4. All components of poverty should be addressed at childhood through quality education and health services so poverty is not perpetuated through adulthood.
5. Creation of peace clubs and GNRC youth cells and/or collaboration with other organizations that are doing promoting human rights and interfaith dialogue for children. That UNICEF and GNRC collaborate together to train and introduce the GNRC toolkit
6. The awareness of the human family should be raised in schools, in rich countries and in all sectors of society and forming networks of youth which created spaces for interreligious participation to raise the awareness of poverty, referring to formal and non formal education
7. Economics and ethics should be integrated, since production does not always produce equality and development does not always alleviate poverty. Therefore dialogue with the various sectors of society, interdisciplinary approaches e.g. to induce empathy among the rich so that they also take initiatives to find solutions.
8. Action oriented programs are needed so that poverty is not perpetuated. Programs should be implemented on ground level in order to have concrete results
9. Interaction between generations. Youth should be encouraged to interact with experienced community workers and leaders and in turn they should provide guidance for the youth.
10. In cultures and countries where children are unable to attend school on a daily basis, materials of study should be developed that allow them to study under alternative methods of education.
11. International day of prayer and action for children by the world’s religions (20 Nov.)

Recommendations from Thematic Group Sessions on “The Ethical Imperative to End Violence Against Children”

- Promoting ethics education to stop violence against children
- Mobilizing religious and spiritual communities to prevent violence against children
- Engaging decision-makers and civil society to build a culture of non-violence

Recommendations on Main Theme: “The Ethical Imperative to End Violence Against Children”

1. Recognize that violence against children takes many different forms in many different settings and regions, including:
 - Violence in schools (including corporal punishment, bullying among children)
 - Domestic violence
 - Sexual abuse and exploitation
 - Issues related to reproductive health including female genital mutilation
 - Violence related to youth gangs
 - Abuse of children in war zones, children used as soldiers
 - Female feticide and infanticide
 - Violence due to religious beliefs
 - Drug abuse among youth
2. Efforts to address violence against children must take into account diverse structural factors that perpetuate violence, including structural violence in the Galtonian sense, poverty and other economic factors, political factors such as inadequate policy, apathy of responsible authorities and state institutions. (Note, however, that factors like poverty should never be used to justify violent practices in schools or homes.) To address these structural factors leading to violence against children, the world’s major powers must be strongly urged to adopt and practice fair policies in their dealings with other parts of the world. In addition, governments must be held responsible for violence against children in schools.
3. Recognize that violence against children is often deeply rooted in cultural practices and beliefs. For instance, physical punishment is often seen both by parents and teachers as a natural requirement for disciplining children. Sometimes children are even abused with religious justification. In many cultures, the child is seen as an object but not as a subject of rights. We must ensure children’s participation in solving problems related to violence. Governments and communities must be held jointly accountable for addressing the cultural roots of violence against children.
4. Violence against children is closely related to power and division in society. “Social fault lines” (caste, class, gender, etc.) are behind all kinds of injustice, including violence. On the other hand, differences among humans are natural and do not in and of themselves lead to structural violence. Rather, natural differences (gender, generational, cultural, etc.) are utilized by those in power to create hierarchical categories and perpetuate injustice. Children are usually at the bottom of the power structure, therefore most susceptible to violence. “Tolerance” of cultural and religious differences is not enough. Division and unequal power must be actively confronted and a culture that celebrates differences be promoted.
5. The emergence of ethno-religious exclusivist ideologies in the conflict regions of the world should be seen as an overall threat to the well being of children. The minds of children can be poisoned easily through indoctrination with extremist ideologies. Children then become victims of these ideologies.

6. Media is functioning as a vehicle and reproduction center for the culture of violence. People of faith must cooperate to counter this trend.
7. Religions have been and are being used by many forces to justify violence. Economic and political conflicts are often portrayed as religious conflicts. Religious leaders must exercise their moral influence boldly to put an end to this misuse of religion.
8. Attention must be given to the rights of the unborn.
9. All of the factors listed above contribute to violence, but it must be recognized that this is not an exhaustive list.

Small Group Recommendations on the Three Sub-Themes:

1st Group: Promoting ethics education to stop violence against children

1. In initiatives for ethics education, listen to children carefully
2. Shift from a materialistic philosophy towards a spiritual one, but maintain a balance between the material and the spiritual.
3. Use *Learning to Live Together* in many settings. A program for training facilitators should be planned and implemented. Social workers and NGOs can help to accomplish this.
4. Members of this discussion group and members of the GNRC are urged to demonstrate their personal commitment to promoting ethics education to stop violence against children.
5. Support general ethics education in schools.

2nd Group: Mobilizing religious and spiritual communities to prevent violence against children

1. Religion should be independent of political power.
2. Religious communities should take the lead.
3. Religion has been a political power. A kind of religious education that will make children open to other traditions must be upheld.
4. Promote inter-religious forums that are committed to peace.
5. In contexts of conflict and animosity, build a culture of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.
6. Address the marginalization of the girl child in African societies.
7. Religious education must be transformed.
8. Selfishness among religious leaders must be eliminated.
9. Religions are being abused to recruit children to combat in war contexts; religious communities must be mobilized to confront this practice together.

3rd group: Engaging decision-makers and civil society to build a culture of non-violence

1. Violence occurs both in private and public spaces. The principles of the CRC should be implemented both in family and public spaces. Civil society must take responsibility for this.
2. More must be done to protect and heal those already victimized by violence.
3. Mass media should be used in our programs to promote a culture of non-violence.
4. Families must be empowered to be builders of peace; governments should have policy to accomplish this.
5. The GNRC should help to draft national plans against violence.
6. Local commissions should be established to monitor and combat violence against children.
7. The GNRC should urge governments to implement the CRC, by ratifying it and implementing it in policy
8. Recommendations must be very contextually sensitive; a policy frame which is workable in one place may not be good in another.

9. Support the recommendations presented by the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children approved by the UN General Assembly in November 2006.
10. Make full use of the UN declaration on religious freedom in the GNRC's work.
11. Promote dialogue on the culture of violence.

Recommendations from Thematic Group Sessions on “The Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth”

- Empowering children through ethics education to protect the planet
- Rallying faith communities to protect the environment

Guidance Advice for the Forum Declaration:

This should be powerful but modest and apologetic to young and future generations. Also it should stress the desire for a simple life style and use the language of stewardship/trusteeship/partnership; *mottainai*—awareness of the preciousness of everything. The Outcome Document should reinforce and draw on the objectives of *Learning to Live Together*.

Also the document should reflect the paradigm shift in our understanding of our interdependency with the world. Suggest the concept of “earth community” be emphasized rather than environment. (Recognizing the need of definitions for clarity, to include global.)

Voices of Children and Young People:

Concern that we are going to need more from the earth and stabilizing the world is not enough. E.g. plant forests, clean air, and consider animal rights.

What has the environment given us and what do we do in return? It has given us life yet we have responded with pollution, deforestation and weapons.

We need to stop the development and proliferation of weapons.

How do we apply the new technologies? Aware that people are afraid to change but we should be courageous and change even small aspects of our lives.

Our daily lives are affected now but we can change this. We can not ignore the problems but must consider them. Awareness that this love for the earth needs to be shared with others and this network will continue this work.

There is a heartfelt belief that people can change their attitudes and much optimism amongst Children and Young People.

We must not stereotype all people in some countries like India, USA, and China as greedy in their use of fuel etc. There are many that are committed to caring for the earth.

How to Involve Children and Young People?

- Promote Children and Young People involvement in direct action; and develop the necessary skills needed through the wider dissemination of the Toolkit.
- Provide opportunities for Children and Young People to engage in a spiritual experience with Creation.
- Continue to support local, national and international dialogue between Children and Young People and to encourage CYP to inform government and religious policies.
- Develop networks between Children and Young People and Older people, inter-generational dialogue.
- Research and map out the provision for environmental studies and education for sustainable development in schools. Encourage sharing of good practice within and between Regional Networks. Run Children and Young People workshops with a focus on peace and protecting the planet.
- Prepare resources in multimedia format.

- Encourage the use of the media to promote the actions of religious communities in addressing the environmental issues.
- Address the educational issue between corporation/business needs and values compared to collaboration/cooperation.
- Connect with other environmental projects e.g. “Eco-heroes” and “Global 500” which provide role models for children and young people.
- Network sharing of good practice and ideas through use of the internet.
- Support conscious consumerism, e.g. buying local food, fair trade products.
- Mobilise funds to further encourage Young People involvement in leading their own projects on a regional basis.
- Call for the days of action e.g. Wet Lands Day, to be universally celebrated.

How to Mobilise the Religious Communities?

- Need to further understand who we are and our place within the universe drawing from the religious traditions their stories and values.
- Plan for a story telling workshop at the next Forum.
- Consider a pilgrimage to planet earth.
- Problems come from greed, hatred and ignorance; what do the religions say about these and demand that these are overcome? Need action as individuals and communities to clarify and then give up or “*akirameru*”; otherwise we are discriminating against those without. Need to reflect the shift in our understanding to take account the needs and rights of victims.
- Call for a statement and declaration about care of the environment during a time of conflict and war. To be promoted world wide in the form of an International Treaty.
- Construct a peace bell in many parts of the world, similar to that in Hiroshima, on an interfaith partnership basis.
- Need to link to the Declaration of Global Ethic and the religious statements and the approach in the Tool Kit. Also map out other initiatives on environment and sustainable development to make links and become more powerful. E.g. make links to the Earth Charter Teachers’ book. And others WWF.
- Religious communities to mobilise governments at all levels to take responsible action with regard to the action drawing on the international instruments like the Earth Charter, Kyoto Protocol....
- Religious leaders to emphasise to world leaders the impact on mothers and children caused by environmental factors, both spiritual and physical health including high infant child mortality.
- Sang Saeng, a NE Asian concept meaning mutually beneficial living. This portrays the intention of the meeting of how to live together.
- Need large number of simple things to bring about change.
- Need to encourage corporate and political change.
- Need more education on sustainable development and environmental issues and teacher training to allow this.
- Need to work with people who do not express their faith or beliefs through organised religions. People of faith and people of good conscience.
- Need to include NGOs besides religious communities.

Day of Prayer and Action for Children and Young People

- Support for the proposal of the Day of Prayer and Action for Children and Young People.
- Promote prayer for earth during the Day of Prayer and Action for Children and Young People.

GNRC Africa Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Number of participants: 20 adults, 5 children

From the following countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Mauritius, South Africa and Nigeria plus 2 guests from USA and 1 from Japan.

Moderator: Dr. Mustafa Ali, GNRC-Africa Coordinator.

Introduction

In 2004 during the GNRC Second Forum in Geneva Switzerland, GNRC Africa members decided to add Somalia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda to the list of countries to be given priority to implement peace education programme that was piloted in Tanzania. The Young Peace Ambassadors' Programmes in Tanzania and Somalia were presented to the GNRC Africa members in Hiroshima. Said Abdalla of GNRC-Kenya made a presentation of the work being done in Somalia. This was followed with a presentation by Finike on the work of GNRC-Africa with Peace Clubs and Peace Ambassadors in up to 2008.

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

- Be more engaged and use religion to eradicate harmful cultural practices. Mobilize resources for actions and especially to protect the girl child and empower her through education to make right choices.
- Through various Interfaith Councils, implement recommendations on poverty, violence and environment at minimum cost
- Promote the value of diversity, choice and responsibility, refrain from silence and carry out social activities that will lead to a more loving and compassionate society
- Hold inter-religious dialogue and link GNRC activities with religious leaders for bigger impact
- Build a network of women and youth of faith where it does not exist
- Use all forms of media including the *Learning to Live Together* toolkit to sensitize both children and parents on the three themes
- Expand the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) Peace Camp to enable youths from other countries to attend.
- Spread the idea of Peace Clubs to other countries
- It was agreed that to help keep the Africa Region active, the secretariat in Dar es Salaam through the office manager there Ms. Finike Gogomoka should be responsible for, setting up a mailing list, giving contacts and maintaining an interactive web-site, sending out monthly reports and producing a quarterly newsletter.

Action Regarding Poverty, Violence and the Environment

To ensure that no child lives in poverty

The Africa region recognized that bad governance: corruption, distribution of wealth, poverty as a cause of violence, drug abuse and crime, unemployment and lack of good agricultural production are the main causes of poverty. We agree to partner with government, CSOs, and private sector and to use opportunities provided by GNRC to lobby and advocate for markets for products that youth produce. We will lay more emphasis on the key position families hold and will therefore will carry out awareness of and advocate for family values, dialogue with children and enable families to provide basic needs. As people of faith and religious leaders, we pledge to take up moral obligations and use

sermons and out of church meetings to fight corruption. Multi-religious approaches will be used as a key to responding to poverty. As religious leaders we will encourage the employment of youth through empowerment point programmes

To end violence against children

The Africa region pledges to stop harmful cultural practices e.g. FGM, early child marriages, abduction for marriage, forced and child labor, domestic violence and harmful media. We advocate for more empowerment of religious leaders through in-training and updated curriculum to be able to deal with the complex issues of violence. We will lobby African countries that have ratified the convention on violence to apply it. We agree that youth have a potential to influence their world and be a voice for those not heard. We vouch to give them our full support and co-operation.

To protect the environment

We acknowledges that the major cause of environmental degradation in Africa is the lack of sanitation and hygiene in the cities, multinationals looting natural resources causing deforestation and desertification, cutting trees for fuel and the refugees problematic. Therefore, as religious leaders, we promise to speak against large scale environmental degradation and to protect the environment by approaching governments, carrying out forestation, toilet, water, cleanliness, and alternative fuel campaigns as well as teaching children and adults the importance of the environment and cleanliness

Input and action for the Day of Prayer and Action for Children

The Day of Prayer and Action for Children on 20 November will be celebrated by raising awareness on the role of religion and what religion has to say on children, their rights and responsibilities. Activities highlighting child issues will be carried out lasting for a whole week.

GNRC Arab States Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Number of persons participating: 16 adults, 4 children

From the following countries: Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan

Introduction

The GNRC Arab States was founded after the GNRC First Forum held in Tokyo, 2000 as Middle East Region, with Mr. Fadi Yarak of the René Moawad Foundation (Lebanon) as coordinator for three countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine). Since the GNRC Second Forum (Geneva 2004) the responsibility of the regional Coordination has been carried out by Rev. Dr. Qais Sadiq, President of the Ecumenical Studies Center, Jordan, where the GNRC Regional Secretariat is placed with the Regional Coordinator Assistant office.

Today, the GNRC Arab States Region includes all the 23 Arab States members of the Arab League. Due to the limited Regional Budget, the activities covered effectively only seven countries (Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Sudan) where the GNRC Youth Net exists with their own periodical meetings where they discuss their challenges and aspirations.

The first regional target was to introduce the GNRC in the Arab States at governmental, public and organization levels.

The GNRC Arab States delegates consider the Third Forum themes as challenges which our children today are facing. Holding the Forum in Hiroshima, the symbolic city of peace, gave the Forum a significant meaning with a great message for the global humanity: No more Nuclear Weapons.

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

1. To launch a capacity building program by empowering national and regional trainers to train on the *Learning To Live Together* toolkit.
2. To organize national and regional workshops for teachers, administrators, parents/teachers associations to introduce and train on the *Learning To Live Together* toolkit
3. To prepare periodic reports concerning the situations of children in each Arab state, having in mind the international indicators and the national reports issued by some NGOs.
4. To spread awareness of social and safety regulations related to homeless children and child labor.
5. To train media personnel on international and national charters and laws are concerning the Rights of the Child and the social problems facing children and families. This will enable the media people to deal with such problems in a specialized method.
6. To ask all forms of media to inform about GNRC activities and recommend them to prepare programs about the problems facing the Arab child and how to deal with them in a way that would guarantee child rights and stability of families.
7. To give the regional and national GNRC the liberty to choose the method of addressing Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations concerning the goal and objectives of the CRC and how to implement them in their policies and strategies.
8. To prepare constitutional and legal studies concerning the different child legislations within national legal systems, as a first step for establishing a unified codification for childhood in the Arab States.

9. To enhance the spiritual and religious awareness of moral values in dealing with the environment in a human balanced way through the social, cultural, educational and political socialization prevailing in all the Arab States.
10. To prepare a data base concerning the problems and laws of childhood, and the pioneering experiences at a national and regional level.
11. To expand the GNRC activities in the other Arab States.
12. To introduce the GNRC as regional consultant organization for child issues beside the Arab States League.
13. To organize the GNRC Arab States Region by dividing it into three sub-regions:
 - Sub-Region I (Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Sudan)
 - Sub-Region II (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia)
 - Sub-Region III (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania).

The other 3 Arab States in Africa (Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Al Comoros) will be under the GNRC Africa Region for the time being.

GNRC Third Forum - Arab States Action Plan 2008-2012

Who (Target group)	What (Activity)	When (Date)	Where (Level)
1. Children	1. CRC camps 2. CRC school clubs 3. Seminars and workshops 4. Inter-faith Thematic Week 5. Prayer Week for the Peace of the Children 6. Children open days activities	Summer time Weekly Short holidays Occasions	National and regional
2. Family and caregivers	Family Awareness 1. Lectures and workshops 2. Counseling sessions 3. Flyers and publications 4. Mother-to-mother action 5. Inter-faith periodical or occasional newsletter	Social events School events and fairs Parents councils and committee meetings Religious events	National
3. Educators and teachers	Training on ethics and Inter-faith education 1. Monitors 2. Trainers		National, regional, and bi-regional
4. Religious leaders	Awareness raising		National, regional and international
5. Policy and decision makers	Awareness raising Common planning		National, regional and international
6. Media	Awareness raising		National, regional and international

GNRC Central Asia and the Caucasus Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Name of the Region: Central Asia and the Caucasus

Number of persons participating: 16 adults, one child

From the following countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, with guest participants from Greenland, S. Korea and Japan

Introduction

Meeting in Hiroshima has been extremely rich in symbolic value. All countries around the world, irrespective of their religious background and values, need to work to ensure that there are no more Hiroshimas. We of the Central Asia and Caucasus region pledge ourselves to reflect in our approach the Hiroshima lesson as the central one in our education to tackle the silent emergencies that children around the world are facing today.

Working together, and learning from each other in Hiroshima, and generating a process of thinking together after the Third Forum, participants from the region affirm their commitment to the following priorities, and to developing interaction and networking in order to pursue these aims.

A critical feature of the 4-year efforts will be the building and support of dialogue potential among people, and children, to encourage that divisive factors and psychological distances be constructively addressed. Present members from the region see the need to ourselves “be the change we want to see in the world,” and to begin by perceiving that non-confrontational and mutually respectful approaches must be our way forward. We cannot re-write history or change the past, but we can work together to build a common future!

Our own activities and conduct will be the best promotion of the Third Forum message of “learning to share.”

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

- To develop a strong knowledge base of facts and data on all rights of children and on faith and culture traditions of our region, reflecting all its rich diversity.
- To give special attention to becoming informed advocates of the environment and climate challenges facing the region and to promote good practices of responsibility.
- To develop and operate an active information exchange to keep channels of communication open in the region. To involve and inform children and young people in this exchange. To also work pro-actively to build dialogue between generations: young and old.
- Adopt ethical education as a key to transforming first ourselves and then to influencing education planners, teachers and learners in all our countries.
- Work to generate re-examination of existing school texts and teaching-learning relating to the identities and diversities of the region and its people. Join or build dialogue on the influences of culture and tradition on different streams of communication and learning.
- Further develop the CENTAC story-book initiative, generate a similar compilation of traditional and popular symbols, and invite creative learning to discover universal or shared values and foster mutual respect.
- Work to promote and advocate that the child is at the centre of our State policies and strategies.

- Pay greater attention to consulting children on issues of poverty, environment and violence.
- Proactively engage educators, teachers, cultural and creative persons and institutions, religious leadership and the media in addressing negative stereotypes with regard to religions and communities in our regions.
- Proactively engage in learning about other historical, cultural or ethnic factors that have challenged mutual understanding and respect for diversity among peoples and area of the region, and work to develop 'spaces' and forums for dialogue. (Study the Turkish initiative to revise schoolbooks to amend references to certain countries).
- Invest in linkage activities to address distances created by language differences in the region. For this purpose, invest in translation and provision of information and materials.
- Encourage and support small-scale and local area initiatives and activities to make the GNRC mandate and message better known and appreciated.
- Organise in 2008 a strategy workshop to map out agreed objectives for specific regional and country-level promotion of the mandate of GNRC.
- Organise in 2009 in one of the capitals or centres of the region a forum on promoting respect for others.
- Actively seek the interest and involvement of religious persons and representatives of culture and the creative arts.
- Invest in family-to-family exchange to build dialogue and understanding through contact programme.
- Undertake visits between and within countries of the region to further these objectives.
- Inform ourselves, and be informed messengers of the international mandates the world has adopted (including UN commitments).

Actions Regarding Poverty, Violence and Environment

- Build a better knowledge base by exchanging information within the region so that we are better informed.
- Generate greater awareness and understanding of the root causes of poverty in the region. Be good learners ourselves.
- Promote ethical education based on universal spiritual values to address issues of poverty, environment and violence.
- Recognise the equal worth of all children and community and the right to inclusion.
- Explore the trends, reasons and causes of violence in the region by adopting and promoting the message 'No More Hiroshimas.'
- Be active networkers: Carry the GNRC message on these issues to other forums in which we participate and promote the message and our ideas in these wider settings.

Inputs and Actions for the Day of Prayer and Action for Children:

- Organise in our respective countries prayer for addressing the poverty of love as part of the Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions. Organise related focus activities or adopt activity plans to promote specific actions.

Working Guidelines:

- The working method of operating an E-secretariat will be sustained. The region hopes to further develop and activate a tri-lingual internet site (English, Russian, Persian).
- The network-building investment in developing an ongoing interaction of young persons, scholars and peace educators from countries of the region will be actively pursued, initially from Delhi base, and progressively from other centres.
- The unexpected and valuable connection with Asiatic Siberia will be further explored.
- The positive potential of consultative linkage with the Europe and South Asia regional initiatives will be further pursued.

Submitted on the basis of regional consultation, by:

Razia Ismail Abbasi, On behalf of the Central Asia & Caucasus Region of GNRC

Date of submission: 8 September 2008.

GNRC Europe Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Number of participants: 26 adults, 6 young people

Countries represented: Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom

Other countries: Japan and USA

Introduction

All children in Europe, and in the world, are entitled to live in dignity with the full recognition of their spiritual values and rights in an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity. Unfortunately, if we look at the issues of poverty, violence and environment affecting children in the region, we have to conclude that this vision is far from reality. Children in Europe experience serious problems to which people of faith and people of goodwill need to respond together. The experience of Hiroshima of going from despair and destruction to rebuilding and hope is a good example to follow.

The dynamic of our regional sessions included a very fruitful dialogue between the young and the adult participants. Through the vivid testimonies of the young participants, the group was able to learn about activities implemented by the GNRC and the impact on the lives of these young people. The Workshop in Salamanca, Spain, allowed adults and young people to focus on the problem of migration. Through different moments of sharing and reflection using the Toolkit, the participants in Salamanca were able to understand the others and value diversity. In a predominantly Catholic country, the young people and the adults enjoyed moments of prayers and spirituality coming from different traditions. This was highly valued.

The two workshops implemented in Brussels, Belgium, on “human dignity” and on “challenges to a consumerist society” were opportunities for building the community among adults and young people from four different religions communities. All the youth and children had opportunities to freely express their own opinions and share their experiences. In the second one, they prepared their statement including their own practical commitments to work for a society that gives real value to living creatures and to the environment.

The One Day Conference in Solihull gave opportunities to children and young people from three schools to reflect on building peaceful communities at school using the Convention for the Rights of the Child. This activity was implemented together with the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The young participants from the Focolare Movement shared the ways as they disseminated the Children Statement that came out of the 2nd Forum in Geneva.

In fact, ethics education was high on the agenda of activities implemented by the GNRC Europe in the period 2004-2008, focusing on issues like human dignity, peace at schools, community cohesion and migration. In all the activities, the children participants came from different ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. According to one of the youth, during the workshops, they did not pay attention to the different backgrounds they were coming from, but to what united them.

Children’s Situation in Europe

Europe is a continent full of rich traditions and cultural and religious diversities. It has been enriched by its contacts and exchanges, not without violence and domination, with a variety of other cultures and civilizations. With greatest unrest around the world, many people look at Europe as a place to live

and rebuild their lives affected, in many cases, by hunger and violence. This situation is putting big challenges not only to the European governments, but also to the civil society and to people of faith. Is Europe ready to share and embrace those who have been their neighbors for many generations and those who are just entering their frontiers? The question of uniting communities in an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding is one of the biggest challenges for Europe today.

Human rights are on the whole respected in most European countries, yet there are millions of children in Europe who are deprived of their fundamental rights. According to a June 2007 report of the European Parliament, over the next twelve months, around 3,500 children under the age of 15 will die as a result of physical assault and neglect in the world's richest nations. One out of every ten school children faces violence at schools—some of it so traumatic that suicide seems the only way out.

Although child poverty in south-eastern Europe and the former republics of the Soviet Union has declined significantly, the number of impoverished children in this region remains disturbingly high.

Poverty is especially acute among immigrants, as one in four poor children has non-EU parents. Migrant children are the most vulnerable; victims of war, persecution, trafficking and those separated from families. The plight of children is aggravated by increased racism and xenophobia towards certain groups including islamophobia. Prejudice against Gypsy/Roma hinders efforts to secure their basic rights.

In relation to violence, child sexual abuse and exploitation are significant problems in Europe today, as it is estimated that between 10% and 20% of children are sexually assaulted during their childhood in a variety of forms that include incest, prostitution, pornography, date rape, peer sexual violence and institutional sexual abuse. The banning of certain religious symbols and customs are regarded by many Muslim children in Europe as a form of violence.

Europe is suffering many natural disasters and other problems related to the constant pollution of the environment. There is a growing awareness among people and governments about the need to protect the earth and develop a more healthy relationship with nature. Children at schools learn practical ways to care for the environment. Human beings should move from being in control of environment and using it for their selfish desires—to being a part of the environment.

Our Way Forward

Young people are more willing to change and respond to the ethical imperatives to protect the earth and to end violence in practical ways. In fact, many of them are already engaged in initiatives to promote solidarity with other young people or to protect the environment. Adults need to become aware of the various ways in which they have failed. We all need to cultivate a more holistic view of our common life in this planet and take responsible actions. The resource book *Learning to Live Together* is a valuable tool in trying to achieve this.

In Europe, there is a need to give attention to the problems facing migrant children giving them the opportunities to integrate while retaining their own positive values and traditions. There is a call for a simpler life style recognizing that small changes can make a big difference. It is important to nurture enthusiasm in young people and encourage them to rediscover the spirituality of creation finding our own place in it.

The GNRC Europe will continue to foster respect for religious and cultural diversities and celebrate commonalities; encourage dialogue and collaboration among people of faith and people of good will in responding to children's rights and nurture the spiritual development of children through ethics education. Guiding criteria for its work includes:

- Full participation and contributions of children and youth.
- Use and dissemination of the resource book *Learning to Live Together*.

- Collaboration with other people and organizations working for the rights and dignity of children. This includes Schools, local Governments, NGO networks, UNICEF, UNESCO, etc.

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

In the next period, the GNRC Europe will address the following areas of priorities in an interconnected way:

1. Ethical imperative to end violence against children

- Promotion of ethics education for children with a specific focus on building peace and uniting communities, using the resource book *Learning to Live Together*.
- Formal and permanent participation of young people in the work of GNRC at all levels promoting their right to contribute to peace and mutual understanding.
- Promotion of exchanges, especially of young people, with other regions of the world in the building of peace.

2. Ethical imperative to end poverty

- Promote dialogue and specific action with religious communities on the main issues affecting children in the area of poverty, including spiritual poverty.
- Actions to respond to the marginalization and discrimination affecting Gypsy/Roma and migrant children.
- Mobilize religious and spiritual leaders in supporting advocacy for the rights of children, specially their right not to be discriminated against.
- Promote the participation of children and youth in addressing issues of poverty.

3. Ethical imperative to protect the earth

- Promotion of a simple life and responsible consumption and use of natural resources.
- Rediscovery of the spirituality of creation in order to capture the enthusiasm of youth.

4. Day of Prayer and Action for Children

- Promotion and active participation in the Day of Prayer and Action for Children at national, regional and local level.
- Include the use of silence for children of no faith, as well as music and symbols.

In relation to practical actions, the following were recommended:

- Training on the use of the manual *Learning to Live Together*, especially for young adults, teachers and educators. This may require collaboration with the European Union.
- Launching of the manual *Learning to Live Together* in Brussels and other European countries in collaboration with the Inter-faith Council on Ethics Education for Children.
- Organization of youth meetings following the participation of young people from Europe in the 3rd Forum.
- Exploration of the possibility to have a GNRC regional meeting in 2009 in Barcelona, Spain.

The European participants are very grateful to Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto for taking the initiative to create the GNRC and to all those who have prepared the Third Forum.

GNRC Israel

Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Number of participants: 8 adults, 2 young people
From the following countries: Israel (one living in US)

Introduction:

Group shared best practices from the interfaith activities each of their organizations is conducting.

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

- Continue GNRC Israel's successful program of "journeys" by Arab and Jewish youth to the sacred and historical sites of their respective traditions.
- Integrate the vital issue of "personal identity" into all GNRC activities in Israel
- Young people stressed that more should be done to let many people know about the activities of the GNRC and the Arigatou Foundation.

Recommendations:

- Continue to develop the "journeys" program. Encourage participants to volunteer in different fields, especially to address environmental issues.
- Commemorate Day of Prayer and Action for Children with a gathering in the house of study and prayer at the Pluralistic Spiritual Center in the peace village of Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom

GNRC Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

26 May 2008

Introduction

33 people from 15 countries participated for Latin America in the regional meetings of the Third Forum. They included 4 children and one person from the United States of America. The participants were from different Christian denominations as well as the Jewish and Baha'i faiths. 9 regional institutions were represented: the Latin American Episcopal Council, the Latin American Council of Churches, the Caribbean Conference of Churches, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, World Vision, the Peace and Justice Service, the Latin American and Caribbean News Agency, UNESCO and UNICEF.

The sessions began with a presentation of the work already implemented by GNRC in Latin America, in the following countries in which it is present: Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador. Since the path already traveled should be taken into account for purposes of continuity and for future planning in the region, it can be summed up as follows:

- An emphasis on violent situations, which has led the Network to prioritize intra-family violence and to gain deeper knowledge about it in the region.
- The implementation of Ethics Education using the *Learning to Live Together* manual, through training workshops on its use with the educational community, through workshops aimed at children, and follow-up using the arts as part of the methodology.
- Direct work with children in Education for Peace.
- Direct and active participation of children in all events, as a characteristic of the Network in the region.
- Importance given to inter-generational dialogue, and
- The creation of inter-religious national committees, which has allowed follow-up on events, and the possibility of sustaining the work of the GNRC at the country and regional levels.

Latin America Agreements

Following the Forum's sub-themes, and in the spirit of learning to share values, action, and hope, the Latin American participants summarized their proposals for the GNRC in the region as follows:

As people of faith, with diverse spiritual roots, united in the ways of life to share the bread that nourishes the body and the spirit, and in use of the freedom that the Maker of life gave us to love the children of the world, we pledge:

In general terms, to:

- Monitor country-level implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Reaffirm the right of children to be protagonist participants in the events, actions and decisions of the Network, emphasizing their learning about ethical leadership, human rights and conflict resolution.
- Reaffirm Ethics Education as a priority and a cross-cutting element in the implementation of commitments related to the three Forum themes.
- Promote dialogue at various levels, on the basis of our identity as people of faith.

In operational terms, to:

- Expand and “weave” the GNRC in other countries, promoting interfaith dialogue through viable proposals, and seeking to influence religious leaders.
- Reaffirm inter-religious and inter-generational Management Committees at the national level with members formally delegated and funded by their institutions as part of economic co-participation in the initiatives of the Network, and which can operate from a particular physical space. Such committees should be able to develop 4-year work plans, with funding projects tailored to the specific requirements and priorities of the country.
- Develop voluntary human resources, while ensuring the funding of activities.
- Use the media and the arts to spread principles of the Network.
- Maintain a website as an essential task, providing a summary of current events and information about available materials.

In relation to Poverty:

Transformative and liberating education including ethical values

Feeding the hope for change, believing that change is possible, and activating creativity for justice and equity. Integrating ethics with economics. Appealing to ethics to counter corruption and identifying the latter as a cause of inequity. Linking material poverty to spiritual poverty that allows for the former. Recovering shared memory as spiritual communities. Linking faith to the practice of citizenship, and ethics as an element of social transformation and mobilization. Supporting access to education for families.

Structural policies for the redistribution of wealth

Identifying the growth of the gap between rich and poor, between countries and within them, as a matter of inequity and an ethical challenge. Participating in public policy matters, demanding that the State comply with such policies, while working on small-scale solutions. Supporting peaceful claims for people’s rights. Prioritizing the satisfaction of children’s basic needs, creating conditions for quality education and training young people to become productive actors in society. Fostering engaged citizenship among children and youth, working with them as they take concrete actions.

The elimination of all forms of discrimination

Prioritizing Network activities favoring excluded and vulnerable populations. Incorporating the involvement of children and young people with different abilities and disabilities. Addressing the situation of women and discrimination against them with affirmative action in communities of faith and in public policies.

In relation to Violence:

Advocacy and the promotion of public policies locally and nationally

Mobilizing churches to address issues of violence using existing public policies and promoting the creation of policies which are lacking and badly needed. Defending life in all its dimensions. Empowering minorities and those who suffer systematic violence, especially girls, aware that they are more frequent victims of violence. Analyzing reality at the country level in relation to different forms of violence, thus emphasizing in some cases work with victims of migration and displacement.

Education on Human Rights, Ethics and Citizenship

Listening to children and promoting their participation. Training leaders who can replicate within their communities the principles that promote a culture of peace. Announcing a culture of life and denouncing a culture of death. Training religious communities in the holistic prevention of violence. Linking the secular development of Ethics with ethical religious language. Taking action about the harm inflicted by the media on children, and reversing its use to raise awareness and sensitize people about family and societal values. Training educators, both in the formal and the informal spheres. Promoting Ethical Education in school curricula.

Actions for promotion, prevention and care from infancy

Using media and proven methodologies. Organizing information and a database to allow work on Ethical Education from an early age and from within the family.

In relation to the Environment:

To relate to the Earth as a mother, and as a work of God, educating so that all will be protectors of the Earth

Affirming the need to link environmental degradation with ethics and the need to care for future generations. Using media to disseminate the work of the GNRC with children on this matter. Denouncing from faith communities the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. Promoting and implementing educational programs, especially those for children and adolescents, which include concrete practices.

Food Production as a priority in relation to energy production, while respecting the environment

Making this issue a priority in the socio-economic policies of the region, and establishing a dialogue with governments. Promoting actions and educational programs on production and food security, including water as a resource.

Socio-environmental policies promotion

Seeking the influence of churches and faith communities in the making and enforcement of policies, starting with training on the subject and concrete commitments. Drawing lessons from native peoples in the pursuit of balance and interdependence with mother earth, beyond mere economic development.

Day of Prayer and Action for Children

Regional participants found that this initiative is very important in the activities of an inter-religious network dedicated to children.

The GNRC in Latin America will implement the Day of Prayer and Action for Children in the countries where it has a presence, hoping that this practice will be expanded gradually to other countries in the region. The manner in which this initiative will be concretized during 2008 will be determined in consultation with the GNRC national groups, learning lessons from these first experiences about what is feasible and what may be the best practices for the future.

GNRC South Asia Regional Session Report and Action Priorities for 2008-2012

26 May 2008

Name of the region: South Asia

Number of persons participating: 30 Adults, 4 Children

From the following countries: India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, UK, USA and Canada

Introduction

South Asia is the birth place for the majority of the world religions and it captures a vast range of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. GNRC South Asia was formed on the basis of representation in the first forum. With the eight years of various experiences with GNRC initiated programs in the region, GNRC South Asia looks keenly at the vacuum of representation from South Eastern and Eastern Asia in the network. The expansion and strengthening is essential in the regional perspective, taking the whole Asian region in to account. South Asia also focuses on the three thematic group recommendations in the group discussions to come up with an action plan which can lead to practical, concrete action rather than a list of recommendations.

Action Priorities for 2008-2012

Ethical Imperative to End Poverty at National Level and Regional Levels

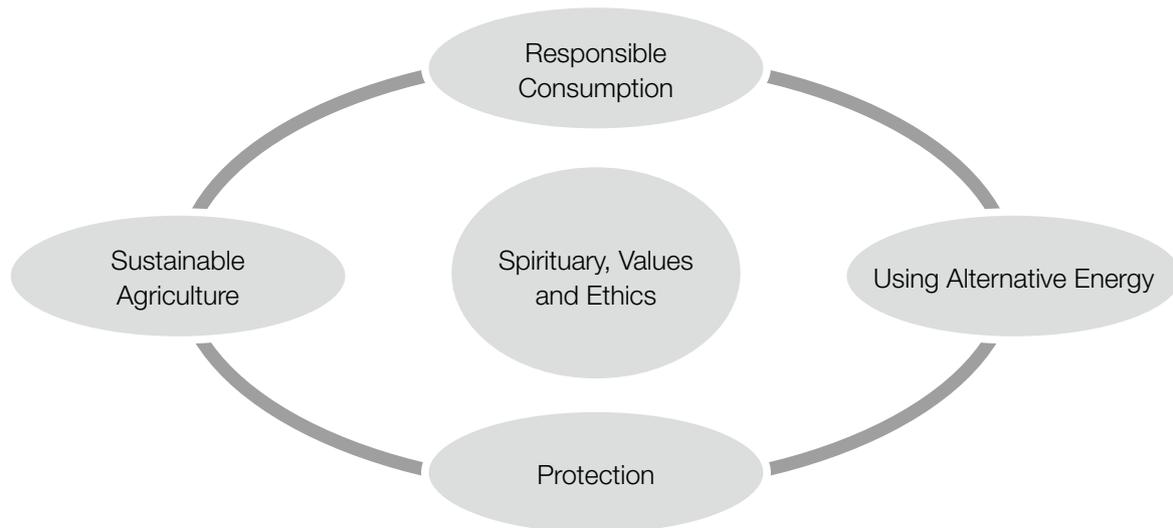
1. Continuity of 'Walking Together' Campaign train Youth Leaders to take up the Campaign
2. Use Ethics toolkit to bring closer to the three themes—Violence, Poverty & Ethics
3. Promote *Anthyodaya* (Gandhian development from the bottom up) and focus on putting children first in Human Development
4. Linkage between Schools & Communities e.g. Private & Government
5. Equip adults with skills & knowledge to work, work with children (form adults groups)
6. Interfaith exchanges/visits
7. Lifelong Education
8. Art & Music (share experiences of children e.g. pain, learnings, be in each others shoes through different mediums e.g. visits, songs (offer from Raffi/Canada & Chikako Kora/Japan internet etc.
9. Exchange cultural shows etc., use media, link ethics to ethics & culture & traditions

Ethical Imperative to Eradicate Violence against Children

1. Facilitate teacher training programmes on peace education and ethics promotion in all levels of educational institutions including pre-primary (ECCD). Focuses: promoting cooperation rather than competition, teachers teaching through example rather than through instructions only.
2. Community oriented programmes to prevent violence after alcohol use (with country specific strategies and emphasis). e.g. Self help groups, youth pressure groups
3. Spiritual programmes for pregnant mothers and the fathers and for pre-pregnant couples
4. Social marketing campaigns directed against violence.

5. Improving immunity among children to promotion of violence through media—children are given the opportunity to imagine alternative positive media which is as interesting and attractive as the current negative media
6. Initiation of a dialogue with religious leaders, CBO/CSO representatives, on incorporating promotion of non-violence and peace
7. Advocate to introduce the tool kit in schools
8. Preparation and collecting of stories, folk and fairy tales which promote non-violence and peace.

Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth



The Regional Network believes that the four areas, Responsible Consumption, Sustainable Agriculture, Protection and Using Alternative Energy, are interconnected on the grounds of Spirituality, Values and Ethics. Therefore each of them needs to be addressed at the same time.

Responsible Consumption

1. Programmes aiming and encouraging consuming locally and naturally (Ethically) produced food
2. Programmes aiming and encouraging community feeding (especially food)
3. Involvement of youth/children in the decision making process with regard to the selection and consumption of food

Sustainable Agriculture

- Bring different organizations and communities together: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) – an agreement between local consumers and the local producers
- Encouraging and initiating home gardening / kitchen gardening and the involvement of children in the process
- Programmes aimed to popularize rain water harvesting

Protection

- Encouraging wormy compost in houses
- Promoting and popularizing the 3R concept
- Educating and empowering on separation and categorizing (mgt) of solid waste

Alternative Energy

- Encouraging to use the energy conserving stove
- Programmes to initiate and empower people to use bio-gas management and solar energy

Inputs and Action for the Day of Prayer and Action for Children:

We hereby support and endorse the idea of international day of prayer and at the same time propose a week of prayer instead of a day and various activities planned throughout the week. Also we propose “A day of prayer, worship, meditation and action for children by the world’s religions” as the title for it to be more culture and religion friendly. Releasing Mass Media messages and highlighting on the international day of prayer, worship, meditation and action for children by the world’s religions and also we propose to launch a stamp to commemorate the same.

Appendix I: A Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions

26 May 2008

A Concept Note and Draft Proposal
by the GNRC Secretariat

Childhood is considered sacred and needing special protection by all the religions of the world. Throughout history, many religious leaders have been the apostles of virtue and good deeds, and protectors and guardians of the weak, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. Countless faith-based organizations today provide services to the needy in areas government and secular services do not reach, from tending to the sick, sheltering the homeless, and educating the minorities, to defending the oppressed. Around the world, there are also many unsung examples of people of different faiths coming together to meet the urgent needs of their communities.

Religions are thus close to the people, but the great potential this gives them to safeguard and improve the well-being of children has yet to be realized adequately. Although all the religions of the world preach love, peace, solidarity and compassion in theory, in practice, far too many crimes are committed, injustice justified, indifference to the plight of children accepted, harmful traditional practices perpetuated, and intolerance and even hatred inculcated in the minds and hearts of children, in the name of religion. This state of affairs is simply unacceptable.

To counter the trend toward abuse of religion that is harmful to children and to energize all religions to put into practice their highest principles of care and protection for children, it is proposed to have a designated day once a year when all the religions of the world will—in unison—rededicate themselves to promoting the well-being of children as their sacred duty. They would do so both through prayers, and through visible, tangible, measurable actions, in all places of worship in all communities of the world.

It is proposed that 20 November, the anniversary of the most universally embraced human rights treaty—the Convention on the Rights of the Child—be designated as the Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions.

On that day, all over the world, in every community, prayer services will be held in all the places of worship on a common theme that relates to the wellbeing of children and protection of their rights. These prayers will include both events held by particular religious communities, as well as interfaith liturgies where people from different faiths come together to pray and recommit themselves to working for children's well-being. The prayer services will give people of faith opportunities to celebrate the gifts that children bring into their local communities and into the world; to reflect on the various ways in which they have failed to bring dignity to children; to explore ways of being more effective in fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to children; and to strengthen their ability to listen and work in partnership with children to build communities characterized by respect and understanding.

To accompany the prayers, one or two common but specific actions will be carried out, nationwide or region-wide, in all places of worship or in their vicinity, or in other locations but with the participation of religious leaders of all relevant denominations. These activities could include, for example, immunizing children against infectious diseases; educating families on the importance of breast feeding; promoting birth registration; campaigns against certain harmful traditional practices; or movements to promote girls' education, peace education, ethics education, etc.

There is a historic precedent for such action. In the 1980s when UNICEF launched a "Child Survival Revolution," it reached out to all the major religions of the world and requested them to

lend their support to this initiative. One specific action UNICEF proposed was to increase childhood immunization levels from less than 20% in the early 1980s to 80% by 1990. It was agreed that such dramatic progress was not possible in most developing countries with their weak health infrastructure. A massive social mobilization was needed involving institutions that reached all communities and enjoyed their respect. The widespread network of religious institutions and leaders was considered the most natural partner for such ambitious—and sacred—enterprise.

When approached, all the world's major religions were very receptive to the idea. Thus whenever a country launched a National Immunization Day, in many countries, their places of worship made it a point to ask all their followers to ensure that they took their children to be immunized as designated health posts on the scheduled dates and times. Indeed quite a few of them offered their premises for such immunization services.

A remarkable example of this was the role played by the Catholic Church in El Salvador calling for "Days of Tranquillity," when a temporary ceasefire was negotiated to stop the ongoing civil war to allow children on both sides of the conflict to be immunized. Since then similar efforts have been made in other countries, including Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Sudan and elsewhere.

More recently, religious organizations have been involved in campaigns to help children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, to counter such harmful traditional practices as female genital mutilation, to promote birth registration, girls' education, etc.

If every year, on a certain pre-designated day, all the world's religions were to agree that on that day there will be common prayers as well as some concrete visible actions to promote the well-being of children in all their places of worship, it would make an enormous difference in the lives of children, and would send a powerful signal to the whole world that religions can be a unifying force for human solidarity.

Obviously the themes and actions selected should command universal respect, and not be partisan, political or divisive. Ideally, it would be best to have one single theme for prayer and action throughout the whole world. But given the great diversity of our world today, there could also be regional or country-wide themes.

To ensure this, religious leaders in every country and community should, in a spirit of interfaith cooperation, work closely together with respected national or international organizations dedicated to the cause of children, such as UNICEF.

An initial formulation of the "Objective" of the Day of Prayer and Action is as follows:

To encourage all religions and faith-based groups to join in A Day of Prayer and Action for Children in every house of worship in all communities to protect the rights and promote the well-being of children, both through prayers and practical actions, to help achieve internationally agreed development goals for children.

To get the process toward adoption and establishment of the Day of Prayer and Action for Children started, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) will convene an initial planning meeting with selected leaders of the world's religions and representatives from UNESCO and UNICEF who will be attending the GNRC Third Forum in Hiroshima, Japan during 24-26 May 2008 to discuss and agree on the concept of "A Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions."

Following agreement on the basic concept, the idea would then be presented to the senior-most religious (and some secular leaders) around the world for their advice, consideration, informal endorsement and blessing. Assuming their concurrence, the first such worldwide "Day of Prayer and Action for Children by the World's Religions" could be launched on 20 November 2009.

As a part of this preparatory process, one year earlier on 20 November 2008, GNRC members in the GNRC's regional networks could organize pilot launches in 4 to 6 countries, or at the sub-national level in some countries.

It is proposed that this subject also be discussed in various thematic panel discussions at the GNRC Forum with a view to solicit suggestions from a cross-section of participants, including children and young people themselves.

Appendix II: List of Participants

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Overseas Distinguished Guests & Speakers			
Hon. Seyed Mohammad Ali Abtahi	President, Institute for Interreligious Dialogue/Former Vice President, Islamic Republic of Iran	Iran	Muslim
Hon. Tadatoshi Akiba	Mayor, City of Hiroshima	Japan	
Rabbi Dr. Golan Ben-Chorin	Director of Congregational Learning, Temple Emeth	USA	Jewish
Ms. Rama Ndao Diouf	Special Advisor to H. E. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal	Senegal	
Dr. Anwar Fazal	Chairman Emeritus, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)	Malaysia	Muslim
Hon. Yuzan Fujita	Governor, Hiroshima Prefecture	Japan	
Dr. Kul Gautam	Former Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF/Former Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations/Program Director, GNRC Third Forum	Nepal	
Dr. Gabriel Habib	Director of Religious and Cultural Relations, Middle East Fellowship (MEF)	Lebanon	Christian
Most Rev. Josiah Idowu-Fearon	Bishop of Kaduna, Church of Nigeria	Nigeria	Christian
Ms. Sarah Jones	Spokesperson on Violence Against Children, UNICEF	USA	
Hon. Yohei Kono	Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan	Japan	
Rev. Munemichi Kurozumi	Vice Chief Patriarch, Kurozumikyo	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Hon. Asha-Rose Migiro	Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations		
Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto	President, Arigatou Foundation/Leader, Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Nichiko Niwano	President, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega	President, World Council of Churches	Cuba	Christian
Mr. Adolfo Perez Esquivel	President, Servicio Paz y Justicia/Nobel Peace Prize Laureate	Argentina	Christian
Dr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro	Rapporteur on Children's Rights, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OAS/Former Independent Expert, The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children	Brazil	
H.E. Daniel D. Polski	Ambassador, Embassy of the Argentine Republic in Japan	Japan/ Argentina	
Ms. Henriette Rasmussen	Earth Charter Commissioner/Former Minister for Social Affairs, Greenland	Greenland	Indigenous
Prof. Susumu Shimazono	Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo	Japan	
H.E. Waleed Siam	Ambassador, General Mission of Palestine in Tokyo	Japan/ Palestine	
Rev. Father Pietro Yoshiaki Sonoda	Consultor, Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue	Japan	Christian
Ven. Gijun Sugitani	Former President, Tendai Buddhist Denomination	Japan	Buddhist
Dr. Kimio Uno	Professor, Chubu University	Japan	
Dr. William Vendley	Secretary General, World Conference of Religions for Peace	USA	Christian
Ms. Ann Veneman	Executive Director, UNICEF	USA	
Ven. Koken Yamamoto	Executive Vice-President, Enryakuji-Temple, Mt.Hiei	Japan	Buddhist
International Organizations			
Ms. Birgitte Alvarez-Rivero	First Officer, Office of the Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations		
Ms. Caitie Bradley	Assistant to Sara Jones		
Ms. Osnat Hafsadi	Security, United Nations		
H.E. Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga	Director, Office of the Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations		
Ms. Dheepa Pandian	Senior Executive Manager, UNICEF		

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Mr. Peter Schatzer	Director, Regional Office for the Mediterranean and Chief of Mission for Italy and Malta, International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Italy	Christian
Mr. Zaw Win	Special Assistant, Executive Office of the Secretary General, United Nations		
Interfaith Council			
Ms. Charanjit AjitSingh	Educationalist/Chair of Trustees, International Interfaith Centre, Oxford	UK	Sikh
Dr. Kezevino Aram	Director, Shanti Ashram	India	Hindu
Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne	Founder and President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Prof. Alicia Cabezudo	Professor, School of Education, University of Rosario	Argentina	Christian
Mr. Andres Guerrero	Partnerships Manager, Civil Society Partnerships, UNICEF	Switzerland	Christian
Prof. Magnus Haavelsrud	Professor, Department of Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology	Norway	Other
Dr. Heidi Hadsell	President, Hartford Seminary	USA	Christian
Mr. Vinod Hallan	Senior Education Adviser, National Strategies	UK	Hindu
Most Rev. Method Kilaini	Bishop, Pastoral, Catholic Archdiocese Dar es Salaam	Tanzania	Christian
Ms. Marlene Silbert	National Education Director, Holocaust Foundation	South Africa	Jewish
Ms. Didi Talwalkar	Leader, Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	Hindu
Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko	Program Secretary, Interreligious Relations, World Council of Churches (WCC)	Switzerland	Christian
Dr. Gary Vachicouras	Executive Director, Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue (FIIRD)	Switzerland	Christian
Dr. Deborah Weissman	Co-Chair, Inter-religious Coordinating Council in Israel	Israel	Jewish
Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena	Lecturer, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Third Forum Organizing Committee			
Ms. Liza Barrie	Chief, Civil Society Partnerships, UNICEF	USA	
Ms. Meg Gardinier	Managing Director, Education and Community Partnerships, US Fund for UNICEF	USA	Christian
Ms. Helene Gosselin	Director, UNESCO Office in New York	USA	
Hon. Samuel Koo	Ambassador for Cultural Cooperation, Republic of Korea/Chairman of the GNRC Third Forum Organizing Committee	Korea	Christian
Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn	International Consultant on Human Rights and Human Development	Uruguay	Christian
GNRC Coordinators			
Dr. Mustafa Ali	Secretary General, African Council of Religious Leaders/Coordinator, GNRC Africa	Kenya	Muslim
Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne	Executive Director, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement/Coordinator, GNRC South Asia	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Ms. Razia Ismail Abassi	International Convenor, Women's Coalition for Peace and Development with Dignity/Coordinator, GNRC Central Asia and the Caucasus	India	Christian
Ms. Marta Palma	Advisor, World council of Churches General Secretary on Children's Issues/Coordinator, GNRC Europe	Switzerland	Christian
Ms. Mercedes Roman	Former Representative to the United Nations, Office for Global Concerns, Maryknoll/Coordinator, GNRC Latin America and the Caribbean	Ecuador	Christian
Rev. Dr. Qais Sadiq	President, Ecumenical Studies Center (ESC)/Coordinator, GNRC Arab States	Jordan	Christian
Ms. Dorit Shippin	Coordinator, Doumia~Sakinah The Pluralistic Spiritual Center in Memory of Bruno Hussar/Coordinator, GNRC Israel	Israel	Jewish
Africa			
Mr. Said Abdalla	Management Assistant, TYPAP, GNRC Africa	Kenya	Muslim

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Ms. Maryan Abdikadir	Program Officer, Reproductive Health, Population Council	Kenya	Muslim
Ms. Bedria Mohammed Ahmed	Executive Director, Head Office, Ethiopian Muslim Women Association	Ethiopia	Muslim
Ms. Nina Gopaul	President, Mosaique	Mauritius	Muslim
Br. Abubakar Francis Kabwogi	Secretary General, Al Rahma	Tanzania	Muslim
Mr. Jowad Kezaala	Secretary General, Inter Religious Council of Uganda	Uganda	Muslim
Ms. Cecille Tshibanda Lepira	President, Catholic Women Association	DR Congo	Christian
Sheik Ibrahim Lethome	Secretary General, Executive Committee, The Islamic Foundation	Kenya	Muslim
Sr. Jean Pruitt	Founder-Trustee, Dogodogo Center Street Children Trust	Tanzania	Christian
Mr. Ally Saleh	Journalist, Swahili Department, British Broadcasting Corporation	Tanzania	Muslim
Rev. Blandina Faustin Sawayael	Programme officer, Human Dignity Advocacy, Norwegian Church Aid	Tanzania	Christian
Arab States			
Dr. Nabil Abdelfattah	Deputy Director, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Al-Ahram Newspaper Foundation	Egypt	Muslim
Mr. Miled Abou Jaoude	Project Coordinator, Rene Moawad Foundation	Lebanon	Christian
Ms. Hadial Al Asmar	General Manager, International Montessori School	Syria	Muslim
Dr. Hana Al-Nasser	Principal, Al-Mashrek International School	Jordan	Muslim
Ms. Jinane Assa'ad	Regional Coordinator Assistant, GNRC Arab States	Jordan	Christian
Mr. Samy Eldaya	Executive Secretary, Orthodox Center	Egypt/ Palestine	Christian
Mr. Abdalla Elhassan	TV Broadcaster, Public Relations, Zain	Sudan	Muslim
Ms. Maryan Iskander	Teacher, English Language, Indian School, Sudan	Sudan	Christian
Ms. Hiam Kasis	Pharmacist, Women com. In MECC/GNRC Syria Office	Syria	Christian
Ms. Riham Kawar	Director of In-service, Amman Baccalaureate School	Jordan	Christian
Rev. Abdo Raad	Superior, College St. Sauveur and Social Center	Lebanon	Christian
Ms. Niveen Shaheen	Program Coordinator, Tamer Institute	Palestine	Muslim
Sr. Emeline Tannous	Principal in catholic school, Saints Coeurs de Jésus et de Marie	Lebanon	Christian
Central Asia and the Caucasus			
Mr. Erkam Tufan Aytav	Secretary General, Dialogue Eurasia Platform	Turkey	Muslim
Ms. Anna Borovskaya	Curriculum Development Coordinator, English, Dextrys	Russia	Christian
Mr. Burenbayar Chanrav	Polio Coordinator, UNICEF State Office for Uttar Pradesh in India	India	Buddhist
Most Ven. Dambajav Choijiljav	Khamba Lama, Tashichoeling Monastery	Mongolia	Buddhist
Ms. Rita Mnatsakanyan	President, "Vahan" NGO	Armenia	Christian
Mr. Javed Noorani	Student, Peace and Conflict, Nelson Mandela	India	Muslim
Ms. Cholpon Omuraliyeva		Kyrgyzstan	
Dr. Elmira Suleymanova	Human Rights Commissioner of Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan	Muslim
Mr. Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev	Ph.D. Candidate, Doctoral Program in International and Advanced Japanese Studies, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba	Tajikistan	
Ms. Meri Yerasosyan	Vice President, Advanced Social Technologies NGO	Armenia	Christian
Europe			
Mr. Jalel Boufaied	Muslim Community of Belgium	Belgium	Muslim
Rev. John Bradford	Priest, Anglican Consultative Council (Family Network)	UK	Christian
Ms. Patricia Bruschiweiler	Project Assistant, Public Witness, World Council of Churches	Switzerland	Christian
Mr. Gabriel Cazacu	Executive Director, Ecumenical Department, Orthodox Church	Romania	Christian
Ms. Stella Chiu	Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Focolare Movement	Italy	Christian
Mr. Christophe Deage	Secretary, European-African Branch, Sukyo Mahikari	Luxemburg	Sukyo Mahikari

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Mr. Kadir Demircan	Director, Turkey Japan Cultural Dialog Society	Turkey	Muslim
Mr. Philip Leivers	Religious Education Adviser, Children's Servicers, Solihull Borough Council	UK	Christian
H.E. Carlos Lopez Lozano	Bishop of Madrid, Iglesia Espanola R. Episcopal	Spain	Christian
Mr. Omid Makhani	Member/Treasurer, National Institute Board, Baha'i Community of Spain	Spain	Baha'i
Imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen	Imam, Muslim Council, Denmark	Denmark	Muslim
Ms. Ana Rodriguez Domingo	Master, Iglesia Espanola R. Episcopal	Spain	Christian
Dr. Jorge Serrano	Child Psychiatrist, University Emeritus Professor/GNRC Belgium	Belgium	Christian
Mr. Ajit Singh	Chairman, Ethnic Minority Consultive Group Executive member, World Congress of Faiths	UK	Sikh
Mr. Christian Teodorescu	General Secretary , Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania-AIDRom	Romania	Christian
Mr. Erkan Toguslu	PhD Student, Plateforme de Paris	France	Muslim
Mr. Mesut Tufan	Author, Cineast	Turkey	Muslim
Mr. Cemal Usak	Secretary General, Intercultural Dialogue Platform	Turkey	Muslim
Ms. Fernanda Vaz	Animator and trainer, MAAC	Portugal	Christian
Israel			
Mr. Khader Alkalak	Administrator/Finacial Manager, Friends of "Open House"	Israel	Christian
Ms. Dalia Landau	Founder, Friends of "Open House"	Israel	Jewish
Mr. Abdessalam Najjar	Education, Spiritual Center Neve Shalom	Israel	Muslim
Latin America and the Caribbean			
Fr. Jose Antonio Diaz	Executive Secretary, Family and Life, CELAM	Colombia	Christian
Br. Francklin Armand	Creator of the Congregation, Fraternity of the Incarnation	Haiti	Christian
Mr. Clovis Bouffleur	Manager, Social Affairs, Pastoral da Crianca	Brazil	Christian
Ms. Karen Christiani	Programme Officer, Youth, Family Life and Gender Affairs, Caribbean Conference of Churches	Torinidad and Tobago	Christian
Ms. Rossana De Avila		Uruguay	Christian
Ms. Ana De Medio	Coordinator, GNRC-Argentina	Argentina	Christian
Fr. Sidney F. Fones	Assistant General Secretary, CELAM-Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana	Colombia	Christian
Ms. Lilia Aurora Franco	Representative, Public Information and External Affairs of National Comission, Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly of Panama	Panama	Baha'i
Mr. Nilton Giese	President, ALC/Secretary General, CLAI	Ecuador	Christian
Rev. Thomas Goekler	Priest, Roman Catholic Church	Guatemala	Christian
Ms. Jean Gough	Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF Panama Regional Office	Panama	Christian
Mrs. Amanda Guerreño		Argentina	Christian
Rev. Ortega Sanchez Isdalia	Project Coordinator, World Vision	Colombia	Christian
Ms. Maria Luisa Jauregui	Youth and Adult Education Regional Specialist, Education, UNESCO	Chile	Christian
Mr. Larry Jose Madrigal	General Coordinator, Masculinities and Youth Program, Centro Bartolome de las Casas	El Salvador	Christian
Sr. Esperanza Principio	Staff, Justice and Peace Commission, Bishop's Conference of Panama, Maryknoll Sisters	Panama	Christian
Ms. Rosilea Maria Roldi Wille	Miembro de la junta directiva , Consejo Latino Americano De Iglesias- CLAI	Brazil	Christian
Ms. Shirley Sacerdote	Educator-Jewish Culture for Children, Congregacao Israelita Paulista	Brazil	Jewish
Ms. Luiza Etsuko Tomita	Executive Secretary/Treasurer, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians-EATWOT	Brazil	Christian
Ms. Tarasieh Werle Vahdat	Coordinator, GNRC-Ecuador	Ecuador	Baha'i

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
North America			
Ms. Farida Ali	International Consultant	USA	Muslim
Ms. Carolyn Arond	Teacher, Project Reach, Boston	USA	Quaker
Dr. David Arond	GNRC Contact/Director of Programs in Spirituality and Public Health, Project Reach, Boston	USA	Buddhist, Jewish
Mr. Raffi Cavoukian	Singer, author and founder of the Child Honouring philosophy	Canada	
South Asia			
Ms. Fathimath Afiya	Executive Director, Care Society	Maldives	Muslim
Mr. Kazi Rafiqul Alam	Chief Executive, Dhaka Ahsania Mission	Bangladesh	Muslim
Mr. Aruna Jayasena	Project Manager, GNRC South Asia, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Dr. Hasmukh Joshi	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
Mr. Dadhi Ram Khanal	Principal, Hindu Vidyapeeth	Nepal	Hindu
Prof. Krishna Khanal	Professor, Political Science, Tribhuvan University	Nepal	Hindu
Mr. Arjun Krishnaratne	Representative, Sarvodaya International	Sri Lanka	
Mr. Sanjeev Madoori	Chief Functionary, Green Cross Society	India	Hindu
Mr. Sundaresan Masilamani	Founder and Chairperson, Sarvadhana Sangam	India	Hindu
Ms. Mahin Merchant	Programme Officer, External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India	India	Baha'i
Ms. Kalpana Mohanty	Research Scholar, Adult Continuing Education and Extension, Gandhigram Rural University	India	Hindu
Mr. Nooranie Muthaliph	Secretariat Coordinator, GNRC South Asia Secretariat, Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya	Sri Lanka	Other
Mr. Kaushik Parikh	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
Mr. Ben Patel	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
Ms. Bindu Patel	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
Ms. Smita Patel	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
Dr. Kalana Peiris	Deputy Director, Community Health, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Dr. R.K. Srivastava	Swadhyay Parivar Movement	India	
East Asia			
Mr. Hikocho Akamatsu	President, Nichiei Art Co., Ltd.	Japan	
Mr. Yasushi Akashi	Chairman, The Japan Center for Conflict Prevention	Japan	
Rev. Bunryu Akiyoshi	Director, Head Office the "BRIGHTEN THE WORLD" Movement Secretariat, Tendai Buddhist Denomination	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masao Aragaki	Local Director-Men's Center, Tokyo, Focolare	Japan	Christian
Prof. Dr. Hyun Kyung Chung	Professor of Ecumenical Studies, Union Theological Seminary	Korea	Christian/ Buddhist
Rev. Kurenai Deguchi	Spiritual Leader, Oomoto	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Mr. Hisashi Doi	Director, YOKO CIVILIZATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE	Japan	Sukyo Mahikari
Rev. Tetsuro Eguchi	Deputy Secretary General, Kohmyo-Kyohkai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Yohichi Eguchi	Director, Kohmyo-Kyohkai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Akie Fujino		Japan	
Mr. Teruyuki Fujiwara	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Keiko Fukata	Keishu (Successor), Enno-kyo	Japan	Enno-kyo
Rev. Mitsuhiro Fukata	Patriarch, Enno-kyo	Japan	Enno-kyo
Ms. Yaeko Hagino	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Prof. Fumiko Hakoyama	Professor, Fuji Women's University	Japan	

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Mr. Shinichi Hasegawa	Director, ILO Office in Japan	Japan	
Mr. Tatsuya Hata	Director, Shanti Volunteer Association	Japan	
Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama	Acting Secretary-General, World Conference of Religions for Peace Japanese Committee	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Ken Hayami	Executive Director, Japan Committee for UNICEF	Japan	
Rev. Mimasaka Higuchi	Honorary Chairman, Japan Muslim Association	Japan	Muslim
Mr. Takashi Hirohashi	Editor, The Shinsyukyo	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masako Hosobuchi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Gensho Hozumi	Priest, Tohkohji Temple of Rinzai Zen Buddhism	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Hiroko Ichikawa		Japan	
Mr. Isao Ichikawa	Executive Advisor for Financial Affairs, Keio University	Japan	
Ms. Kyoko Ikeda	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Shigeo Ikuta	Secretary General, Osaka Branch, Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Zuido Inoue	Executive Director, Minobusan Kuonji	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Hiromi Ito	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Moriyasu Ito	Priest, Meiji Jingu	Japan	Shrine Shinto
Mr. Yoshihiro Ito	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Akihiro Iwabuchi	Secretaries' Office, Shoroku Shinto Yamatoyama	Japan	Shorokushinto-Yamatoyama
Mr. Hitoshi Jin	Executive Director, The ZENSEIKYO FOUNDATION for Youth and Child Welfare	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Toshihiko Kaibuchi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yoshiko Kaio	Chairwoman, Soroptimist International of Kure	Japan	
Mr. Nobuyuki Kajiwara	Director General, Children's Outlook Bureau, City of Hiroshima	Japan	
Mr. Shizuka Kamei	Member, the House of Representatives, Japan	Japan	
Rev. Takeshi Kawabata	Director, External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kaoru Kobayashi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kumiko Kobayashi	Local Director-Women's Center, Tokyo, Focolare	Japan	Christian
Rev. Ryusyo Kobayashi	Former Executive, Enryakuji-Temple, Mt.Hiei/Director, Tendai Buddhist Comprehensive Research Center	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masatoshi Kohno	General Manager, Kosei Cultural Association	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Michiaki Koibuchi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Shigeaki Koike	Chief, Educational Affairs, Enno-kyo	Japan	Enno-kyo
Ms. Mika Kojima	Staff, Spiritual Leader's Office, Oomoto	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Mr. Hiroaki Komatsu	Representative Director, Alua John Kolu Corporation	Japan	Christian
Ms. Yoko Komiyama	Member, the House of Representatives, Japan	Japan	
Ms. Chikako Kora	President, ASPEN Inc.	Japan	
Mr. Kazuo Kouga	Secretary to Yohei Kono	Japan	
Rev. Keiji Kunitomi	Director, General Secretariat, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Chizuko Kuwahara	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tadashi Kuwahara	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Maria Lilu MacDowell	Representative of the Focolare Movement, Japan, Focolare	Japan	Christian
Mr. Eisho Machida	Secretary to Executive Director, Minobusan Kuonji	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Takayuki Magome	Deputy Director, Youth Division, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Koichi Matsumoto	Director, Youth Division, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Nisshin Matsushita	Chief Priest, Jojuin-Temple Hommon Hokkeshu Buddhist	Japan	Buddhist

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Rt. Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake	Director General, The Konko Church of Izuo	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Rev. Keishi Miyamoto	Chairman of the Board, Myochikai/Representative, Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hiroyuki Morita	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Kazuhiro Motoyama	Deputy Chief Priest, Tamamitsu Jinja	Japan	Shrine Shinto
Rev. Ichijiro Murakami	Representative, General Affairs, Shoroku Shinto Yamatoyama	Japan	Shorokushinto-Yamatoyama
Mr. Masayasu Murakami	Acting Executive Vice President, The Council on East Asian Community	Japan	
Ms. Ai Nagano		Japan	
Ms. Yasuko Nagano		Japan	
Mr. Masaharu Nakagawa	Member of the House of Councillors	Japan	
Rev. Ryosho Nakajo	Administrator, Seicho-ji-Temple	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yukie Nimura	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Takeshi Nishida	Head, Ittoen	Japan	Ittoen
Rev. Munehiro Niwano	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Naoki Ohe	Managing Director, Community Chest of Tokyo Metropolis	Japan	
Ms. Chikage Ohgi	Former President, House of Councillors	Japan	
Mr. Tairo Ohmori	Seicho-ji-Temple	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masumi Oishi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hidenori Okamoto	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Honyo Okuno	Director of Finance, Minobusan Kuonji	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masayuki Onoue	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Tsuneko Onoue	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Michiomi Rikihisa	Next Generation of Spiritual Leader, Zenrinkyo	Japan	Zenrinkyo
Ms. Hiroko Sai	Artist	Japan	
Mr. Kenji Saito	Secretary General, Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan	Japan	Shorokushinto-Yamatoyama
Ms. Harumi Sakai	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Norio Sakai	Chairman, Kosei Gakuen	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Eishu Sato	Department of Liturgy, Meiji Jingu	Japan	Shrine Shinto
Rev. Jiko Sato	Priest, Choozen Rituin	Japan	Buddhist
Prof. Dr. Junichi Sato	President, International Research Center of Metatechnology	Japan	
Ms. Kanoko Sato	Choozen Rituin	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Mayako Sato	Choozen Rituin	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yasuyuki Sato	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yuiman Sato	Choozen Rituin	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hisashi Seki	Secretary General, Shanti Volunteer Association	Japan	
Mr. Mitsushiro Senju	General Manager, Group & Organizational Relations, Japan Committee for UNICEF	Japan	
Mr. Hironobu Shibuya	Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children Japan	Japan	
Ms. Marisha Shibuya		Japan	
Rev. Kunihiko Shimamoto	Chief Director of the Oomoto Headquarters, The Oomoto Foundation	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Rev. Sadataka Shimoyamada	Priest, Meiji Jingu	Japan	Shrine Shinto
Rev. Fumio Shishino	Executive Director, Fusokyo	Japan	Sectarian Shinto

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Mr. Masayuki Suda	Director, PL Comprehensive Research Institute	Japan	Perfect Liberty
Ms. Sachiyo Sugita	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yukihiro Sugita	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Youko Suzuki	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Toshiyuki Takada	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kikuro Takagi	Former Senior Editor, Yomiuri Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Tadashi Takatani	Secretary General, Niwano Peace Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Saburo Takizawa	Representative, UNHCR Representation in Japan	Japan	
Ms. Chiyo Tanaka	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Masamichi Tanaka	Director, International Department, Universal Love and Brotherhood Association	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Rev. Tsunehito Tanaka	President, Shinseikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tomohide Taniguchi	Director, Sales Department, Hiroshima Branch, Takenaka Corporation	Japan	
Prof. Shigeaki Tomita	President, Tomita Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Naoyuki Tomoishi	Section Chief, Secretariat, Sukyo Mahikari	Japan	Sukyo Mahikari
Ms. Hisae Uchida	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kozo Watanabe	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Masao Yamada	Director, Hokuto-Area, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Noyu Yamada	Director-General, The Tendai Institute for Buddhist Practice at Mt. Hiei	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Hamako Yamakawa	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masami Yamamoto	Secretary General, Hiroshima Area Committee, Japan Committee for UNICEF	Japan	
Mr. Hiromi Yano	Deputy Chief, International Department, Oomoto	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Ms. Kayoko Yoshida	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Prof. Osamu Yoshida	Professor, Toyo University	Japan	
Children			
Ms. Masayo Akita	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Aydan Allahyarova		Azerbaijan	Muslim
Ms. Salam Al-Naber	The Fisher Program	Jordan	Christian
Mr. Abdalla Ali Amour	Utaani Secondary School	Tanzania	Muslim
Mr. Hiroe Ara	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Ornella Barros Carrasquilla	GNRC-Colombia	Colombia	Christian
Ms. Gal Berkovich	Neve-Shalom/Wahat al-Salam	Israel	Jewish
Mr. Nader Ighani Castilla	Bahai Community	Spain	Baha'i
Ms. Viviana Raquel Castillo	GNRC-Ecuador	Ecuador	Christian
Ms. Yejin Chung	Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Ms. Rand Farahat	The Fisher Program (ESC)	Jordan	Christian
Ms. Amelia Folkema		Belgium	Baha'i
Mr. David Daniel Gil Segovia	ACRINAVE	Venezuela	Christian
Ms. Kelli Graziano	Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Ms. Rahmeh Hamdan	The Fisher Program (ESC)	Jordan	Muslim
Mr. Mohamed Said Hani	The Islamic Foundation	Kenya	Muslim
Ms. Mollie Hykel	Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Mr. Teruo Inokubo	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Mr. Shota Inokuchi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Avani Jariwala	Junior 8	USA	Hindu
Ms. Nuru Sheha Juma	GNRC-Africa	Tanzania	Muslim
Ms. Hisae Kaibuchi	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Manela Karunadasa	Sarvodaya Movement	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Mr. Soya Kuronuma	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Clara Joseph Mduma	GNRC-Africa	Tanzania	Christian
Mr. Nicolas Morad Meslaoui	Student	Belgium	Muslim
Ms. Yuki Ohi	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Naomi Okano	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Lilian Olson	Boston-Initiative	USA	Christian
Ms. Aziza Haddad Pedersen		Denmark	Muslim
Mr. Isaac Lukumayi Peter	GNRC-Africa	Tanzania	Christian
Ms. Maria Chiara Poggi	Focolare Movement	Italy	Christian
Ms. Kaveri Raja	Shanti Ashram	India	Hindu
Ms. Roxana Yamileth Ramos	Parroquia San Francisco de Asis	El Salvador	Christian
Ms. Stephanie Ramos	Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Mr. Tharindu Rashmina	Sarvodaya Movement	Sri Lanka	Buddhist
Ms. Yoriko Sakurai	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Bissan Salman	Neve-Shalom/Wahat al-Salam	Israel	Christian
Mr. Pieter Tiemermans	Focolare Movement	Netherlands	Christian
Mr. Ehab Wahhab	The Fisher Program (ESC)	Jordan	Christian
Ms. Anam Wasey	Shanti Ashram	India	Hindu
Ms. Kaho Yamamoto	Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Chaperons			
Mr. Pierre Ruffo de Bonneval	Focolare Movement	Norway	Christian
Ms. Yumiko Fujisawa	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Monica Giuliani	Focolare Movement	Italy	Christian
Ms. Finike Kaisha Gogomoka	GNRC Africa	Tanzania	Christian
Mr. Vijayaragavan Gopal	Coordinator, Shanthi Ashram	India	Hindu
Ms. Aygun Huseynli	Projects Officer, Azerbaijan Child-to-Child Peace Network	Azerbaijan	Muslim
Ms. Mayumi Inoue	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Archana Sandip Jariwala	Junior 8	USA	
Ms. Mika Kiriake	Teacher, Hiroshima International School	Japan	
Mr. Masakazu Koshio	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Evelyn Lorena Lopez Cortez	Coordinator, Program of Attention to the Childhoods, St. Francisco de Asis Parish	El Salvador	Christian
Ms. Naomi R. Olson	Boston-Initiative	USA	
Ms. Sunilde Pastora Perez	General Coordinator, ACRINAVE	Venezuela	Christian
Ms. Vivian Rabia		Israel	
Ms. Maria Elena Rivera	Assistant, GNRC Latin America	Ecuador	Christian
Ms. Maria Del Carmen Roa	Authorized Tutor, Baha'i Community of Spain	Spain	Baha'i
Ms. Laila Saddic	Orthodox Youth Fellowship	Jordan	Christian
Mrs. Ana Maria Serrano	Teacher/SIESC Member/GNRC Belgium	Belgium	Christian
Interpreters			
Ms. Frances Bennaton		Honduras	
Ms. Cristina Dellamula		Switzerland	

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Ms. Martha Guillen		Honduras	
Mr. Yoshio Hida		Japan	
Mr. Carlos Sintado		Switzerland	
Mr. Sepehr Tarverdian		Iran	
Ms. Yukiko Yamashita		Japan	
Press			
Ms. Chika Akiyama	Staff Writer, Hiroshima General Bureau, The Asahi Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Motohiro Araki	Photographer, Hiroshima Bureau, Kyodo News	Japan	
Mr. Katsuhiko Asagiri	President, IPS Japan	Japan	
Ms. Lynette Lee Corporal	IPS Asia-Pacific	Thailand	
Mr. Thalif Deen	UN Bureau Chief and Regional Director, Inter Press Service (IPS) News Agency	USA	
Ms. Rika Hagiwara	Reporter, Hiroshima Bureau, Kyodo News	Japan	
Mr. Tomoaki Hanita	The Kosei Shimbun Newspaper, Kosei Publishing Company	Japan	
Mr. Jun Hasegawa	Girudo Shashin News	Japan	
Mr. Michihiro Iikawa	Chief, Editorial Division, Chugai Nippo	Japan	
Mr. Satoshi Inuma	Reporter, Hiroshima Station, Japan Broadcasting Corporation	Japan	
Mr. Masayoshi Ishikawa	Reporter, News Department, Editorial Bureau, The Chugoku Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Satoshi Iwanaga	News Center, News Production Bureau, RCC Broadcasting Co., Ltd.	Japan	
Mr. Shunsaku Iwanari	Reporter, News Center, Editorial Bureau, The Chugoku Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Nobuhito Kudo	Editor, The Buddhist Times	Japan	
Ms. Akina Kuraoka	Staff Writer, General Hiroshima Bureau, The Yomiuri Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Takao Kuriyama	Reporter, Editorial Bureau, The Shinshukyo	Japan	
Mr. Tomomitsu Miyazaki	Editorialist, The Chugoku Shimbun	Japan	
Ms. Tomoko Nemoto	Kosei Publishing Company	Japan	
Ms. Mizuki Osawa	Reporter, Hiroshima Branch, The Mainichi Newspapers	Japan	
Mr. Terufumi Otaki	Reporter, Osaka Branch, The Shinshukyo	Japan	
Mr. Bill Roberts	Freelance Journalist, Oomoto Foundation	Japan	
Ms. Hiroe Sasano	Reporter, News Department, Shinhiroshima Telecasting Co., Ltd.	Japan	
Mr. Jun Shiina	President and Executive Managing Director, Chugai Nippo	Japan	
Ms. Yaeko Sugiyama	Reporter, General Hiroshima Bureau, The Yomiuri Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Shinichi Takehara	Executive Director, IPS Japan	Japan	
Ms. Hiromi Wakabayashi	Reporter and Assistant Manager, News Center, News Production Bureau, RCC Broadcasting Co., Ltd.	Japan	
Mr. Eiichi Yasuda	Reporter, General Hiroshima Bureau, The Yomiuri Shimbun	Japan	
Mr. Michiyoshi Yokoyama	Visiting Editor, The Mainichi Newspapers	Japan	
Staff/Volunteers			
Mr. Yasuhiro Agatsuma	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Keiichi Akagawa	Deputy Director, External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masae Akasu	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kinji Andoh	Dharma Missions Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Marie Aoki		Japan	
Ms. Yasuyo Atsumi		Japan	
Ms. Yukari Azegami	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Peter Billings	Arigatou Foundation	USA	Christian
Mr. Hideyoshi Chiku	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Ms. Hiroko Fujimoto	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Shozo Fujita	Secretary General, Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yasuhisa Fukuda	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kie Fukushima	Japanese Committee of WCRP	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kiyonari Hamano	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yuko Hamano	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hironori Hara	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hiroyuki Hayashi	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Aki Hirakawa	Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yukako Hirokawa	Japanese Committee of WCRP	Japan	Buddhist
Rev. Tomoko Hirota	Director, General Affairs Department, Japanese Committee of WCRP	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yuriko Hisamune		Japan	
Mr. Fumitoshi Hongo	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hiroko Ikeda	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tomohiro Ishida	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tadaaki Ishiyama	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Mariko Ito	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masako Ito	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Mayuko Ito		Japan	
Mr. Motomasa Ito	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Noriaki Ito	Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Reiko Ito	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yoshiko Ito	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Naoko Iwamoto	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yoshiko Iwamoto	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Atsushi Iwasaki	Secretary General, GNRC	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Chika Iwasaki	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kazuko Iwasaki	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Miyako Katsumata	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Akiko Kimura	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Taiichi Kodama	Dharma Missions Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Michiko Kubo	Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Geun-Mi Kwon		Korea	
Ms. Lina M. Leal	Intern, Arigatou International	Switzerland	Christian
Mr. Takaki Maehara		Japan	
Mr. Kazue Matsuyama	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Naoko Mimura	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kaoru Miyake	Konko Church of Izuo	Japan	Sectarian Shinto
Mr. Takeo Miyoshi	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yoko Motono	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Midori Nagasaka		Japan	
Mr. Hiroaki Nakamoto	Dharma Missions Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Taeko Nakamura		Japan	Christian
Ms. Yukiko Nakamura	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yumiko Nakamura		Japan	Christian

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Ms. Kayoko Nakano	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Mayumi Nakatsutsumi	Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hiroyuki Nasu	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masaaki Niijima	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Miho Nishi	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yasuhiro Nozaki	Deputy Director, Dharma Missions Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Ryoko Onso		Japan	
Ms. Machiko Orihara	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tadao Osada	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Se-Eun Park		Korea	
Ms. Suzuka Sakurai		Japan	
Mr. Syunsuke Sasaoka		Japan	
Ms. Manami Sato	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Miyuki Sato	Arigatou Foundation	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Tomonori Sato	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masao Sekiya	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kenji Shibachi		Japan	
Rev. Masao Shimura	Deputy Director, External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yoshinori Shinohara	Japanese Committee of WCRP	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Keiichiro Shioda	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Kumiko Shirai	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Grace Song		Korea	
Mr. Koji Suzuki	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Mari Suzuki	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Masue Suzuki	World Conference of Religions for Peace	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Takashi Suzuki	Manager, Religious Direction Department, Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yuji Suzuki	Manager, General Affairs Department, Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Chiharu Tachikawa	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Miki Tada	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Marina Takagi		Japan	
Ms. Akie Takahashi	External Affairs Department, Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Yohei Takeda		Japan	
Ms. Hiroko Tamaki		Japan	
Mr. Kazunari Tone	Myochikai	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Djenane Tosbath	Executive Secretary, Arigatou International	Switzerland	Christian
Ms. Eiko Tsunoda	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Shigehide Uchida	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Agneta Ucko	Director, Arigatou International	Switzerland	Christian
Ms. Tomoko Ueda	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Masafumi Uemura	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe	Program Officer, Arigatou International	Switzerland	Christian
Mr. Kazuo Wada	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Katsukiyo Watanabe	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Tomoe Watari	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Hiroshi Yamada	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Yasuyo Yamamoto	Rissho Kosei-Kai	Japan	Buddhist

Name	Job Title, Organization	Country	Religion
Ms. Miyako Yoshida	Arigatou Foundation (Volunteer)	Japan	Buddhist
Mr. Kazumasa Yoshinaga	Japanese Committee of WCRP	Japan	Buddhist
Ms. Keiko Yoshioka		Japan	

