



# The Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children

**Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC)**

9,10 and 11 May 2017 / Panama City, Panama

## About Us

The GNRC is a global-scale interfaith network of organizations and individuals specifically dedicated to securing the rights and well-being of children everywhere. GNRC members come from all of the world's major religions and many other spiritual traditions.

Together, the GNRC is committed to creating a world where every girl and boy

can grow up safe and sound—a world where every child has the chance to shine.

The GNRC is one of the four main initiatives of Arigatou International, a faith-based non-profit organization. Arigatou International works under the motto of "All for Children," bringing together people from all walks of life to build a better world for children.

## GNRC Around The World



## The Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children

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

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

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

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

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

Children thrive and grow in trusting relationships with people who love and care for them. Ideally,



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The GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum  
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and for the most part, this happens within families. Sadly, it also cannot be denied that the home is the place where most abuses occur. Families need support to grow to become peaceful, safe sanctuaries.

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

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

**We commit to:**

1. Listen to children with empathy and respect, welcome their wisdom and gifts, and continue to work side-by-side to address violence against them;
2. Ensure that our religious places are safe for all children, and especially for the victims of violence and abuse, and vulnerable children such as those with disabilities;
3. Increase our personal and institutional commitments to take concrete actions to address the challenges voiced by children at this forum;
4. Educate our leaders and communities about the different forms of violence against children and deploy resources to prevent and address it within and beyond our communities; educate children about human sexuality and what they can do to keep themselves safe; work to safeguard children from harmful media content and engage the media in preventing violence against children;
5. Partner with global programs such as End Violence Against Children and make the most of existing tools for addressing the root causes and drivers of the violence children face, with a special focus on countering violent extremism, gang violence, harm to children by organized crime, and sexual exploitation and abuse;



6. Strengthen local communities by offering education in positive parenting and ethical values to help families and children develop empathy, become more resilient, and grow spiritually;
7. Identify and challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate violence against and sexual exploitation especially of girls;
8. Embrace internationally agreed strategies and mechanisms to address violence against children, including the Sustainable Development Goals 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children; 5.2 and 5.3 on ending violence against women and girls; and 8.7 on ending economic exploitation of children;
9. Strengthen cooperation and partnerships across Arigatou International initiatives, the wider religious and spiritual communities and strategic players at local, national, regional and global levels;
10. Work to generate greater social and political will for legislation, policies, and increased funding of programs to protect children from violence.

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

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

**Issued in Panama City, 11 May 2017**



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## Message from the GNRC Convenor

### Looking Ahead from the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum

First of all, on behalf of Arigatou International and as Convener of the GNRC, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the valuable contributions not only of all Forum participants, but also of many other supporters of Arigatou International, to the success of the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum held in Panama in May 2017. Each successive GNRC forum has built upon what has been achieved by GNRC members and supporters around the world. In this sense, I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude in particular to Ms. Mercedes Roman, who has dedicated herself to the mission of the GNRC since the very beginning of the GNRC in the year 2000 and has been instrumental in making the GNRC in Latin America and Caribbean region what it is today. Without her great contributions and long-time service as GNRC Coordinator for the region and as an advisor, the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum in Panama would have never even taken place.

If religious people of different faiths come together in prayer and practice to work for

children in collaboration with international organizations, governments and NGOs, we can make a major difference in the lives of children around the world. This was the conviction and aspiration of the late Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, Leader of Myochikai and President of Arigatou International, when he proposed the idea of a worldwide interfaith network for children and inaugurated the GNRC at its first forum in 2000. I believe that the more than 500 participants, including children, who gathered from around the world for the 5<sup>th</sup> Forum made a very good start with the firm commitments set out in the Panama Declaration. Now, it is up to all of us to work together to deliver on those commitments, to create tangible outcomes in ending violence against children in the months and years ahead.

The real success of every GNRC Forum depends on how we follow up on the commitments made in the forum. Our challenge here is how each of the forum participants, now back in their home contexts, can translate the Panama commitments into concrete actions and then link and connect



all of these actions taken by GNRC members, supporters and partners at various levels around the world, in order to make a real difference overall. In other words, even the smallest action in the smallest village can be part of the global initiative for children that we share. And we welcome and encourage action by the children themselves, as active protagonists who can offer the full benefits of their wisdom and unique capabilities to the work of the whole. Arigatou

International will not only continue to work with the forum participants, but also invite GNRC members, supporters and people of all walks of life to join us in the moral imperative to put an end to violence against children.

**Rev. Keishi Miyamoto**

President, Arigatou International  
Convenor, Global Network of  
Religions for Children



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## ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL

The primary supporter of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), Arigatou International, is a non-profit organization which strives to bring people from all walks of life together to build a better world for children. Arigatou International is "All for Children," and it draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to work together on children's issues.

Arigatou International develops and sustains unique multi-stakeholder initiatives designed to ensure that all children are treated with dignity, all children's rights are respected, and all children have the opportunity to freely pursue their full human potential. Involving diverse partners, these initiatives emphasize both grassroots action and international advocacy.

Arigatou International has great faith in children, and always invites them to help shape its work. Young people are deeply respected, active partners in every Arigatou initiative.

Join the "All for Children" online community at: <http://community.arigatouinternational.org/>

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