

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Leaders from World’s Major Religions and Spiritual Traditions Commit to New Joint Efforts to End Violence Against Children**

Five hundred faith leaders from 70 countries, joined by representatives of governments, the United Nations, and international and grassroots organizations, have made a solemn commitment to greater effort and cooperation in the cause of ending violence against children. The leaders met in Panama City, Panama for the 5th Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) from 9-11 May 2017, reaffirming the universal “moral imperative to protect children from harm.”

The outcomes of the forum were summed up in “The Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children,” which was adopted enthusiastically by all the participants at the end of the Forum.

The President of the Republic of Panama H.E. Juan Carlos Varela officiated the opening of the Forum, calling for an urgent response from the international community and all of the human family to address the plight of children worldwide. Speaker after speaker, including UNICEF Executive Director Mr. Anthony Lake; UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Preventing Violence Against Children Ms. Marta Santos Pais; Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children Director Dr. Susan Bissell; HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan; President of the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran; World Council of Churches General Secretary Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit and WCC Moderator Dr. Agnes Abuom, declared in one voice that it is unacceptable that one billion children worldwide continue to endure physical, psychological or sexual violence.

The leaders thanked Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President of Arigatou International, for convening the GNRC, calling for more support to end the conditions that cause one child to be killed every five minutes in a violent act, worldwide. The faith leaders promised to reject and speak out against all forms of violence against children. Welcoming participants to the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum, Rev. Miyamoto maintained that it is indeed possible to end violence against children if religious and spiritual communities, governments and international as well as multilateral organizations work together.

Noting that the causes of violence against children are complex and varied, including deep-seated cultural, political, familial and socio-economic causes such as poverty and social

exclusion, the faith leaders called 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” to end today’s unprecedented violence against children.

The faith leaders and international organizations represented also vowed to “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.”

The First Lady of the Republic of Panama Honorable Lorena Castillo Garcia de Varela, who also attended the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum, asked faith leaders to put aside their differences and do all they can to end violence.

The GNRC Forum is organized every five years by Arigatou International to address issues affecting children globally and bring people together to build a peaceful world.

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#### NOTE TO EDITORS

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

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. 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.

##### 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.