



REPORT

Launch of

Faith and Children's Rights:

A Multi-religious Study on the

Convention on the Rights of the Child

This Study was carried out with the participation and support of World Vision and KAIICIID.



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Mrs. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights.

On 19 November 2019, the first ever global study focusing on the role of religious leaders and religious communities in promoting children's rights was launched in Geneva to honour the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The launch was attended by more than 120 representatives of permanent missions, religious communities, UN agencies and civil society organisations.

The study developed by Arigatou International, with the guidance of the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, Ms. Marta Santos Pais, and UNICEF, in collaboration with the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and WorldVision International, was launched with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee on the

Rights of the Child, African Union – ECOSOCC, Al-Azhar University, the Baha'i International Community, Child Rights Connect, the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development, the New York Board of Rabbis, Religions for Peace, Sarvodaya Movement, Shanti Ashram and the World Council of Churches.

The launch was co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations, and the Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations.

Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President of Arigatou International, in his welcome message highlighted the importance for all stakeholders to receive this study as a resource to support their efforts and to partner with religious leaders and religious communities to expand their action, mobilize new partners and further engage local communities to protect children from violence and promote their healthy development.

The discussion was open by Deputy High Commissioner Mrs. Kate Gilmore, who on behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Michelle Bachelet, highlighted how the world's religious communities and their leaders have unparalleled potential to lift up the dignity of children worldwide in a time where millions of children are facing the hardest challenges to their dignity; recalling how critical it is to strengthen the symmetry of faith with human rights as a powerful resource to improve the lives and well-being of children all around the world. Mrs. Gilmore highlighted the role of faith to draw people out to awareness and responsibility for an impact upon the other, respecting the right of freedom of religion or belief, and bridging those who have religious beliefs and those who do not adhere to a particular religion.

Ms. Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, highlighted how the promotion and protection of child rights by religious leaders contribute not only to the improvement of the situation of children, but also helps to enhance social cohesion in societies, leading to more peaceful communities and more inclusive environments. She explained how UNICEF partnerships with religious leaders, especially aims to reach the poorest, most vulnerable and hardest to reach



Professor Savitri Goonesekere, member of the Faith and Children's Rights Study Authorship Team.

children, as religious leaders have deep and trusted relationships with their communities and often have strong linkages with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the society.

The discussion continued with Professor Savitri Goonesekere, member of the Faith and Children's Rights Study Authorship Team, giving a brief introduction of the Study. Professor Goonesekere highlighted the participatory and consultative methodology used to develop the study to obtain the voices of faith groups and children, and to provide opportunities for them to share their experiences in regional consultations. She described the often-significant role that diverse communities of the world's faith traditions have played in the preparation, adoption, ratification and implementation of the CRC over the past three decades. The Study recognizes the innovative work and good practices carried out every day to further children's rights and contribute to child protection by religious groups. These practices are documented in the study with short case-studies.

Prof. Goonesekere highlighted in particular that the Study is an invitation for action and contains new ideas for collaboration and



Mrs. Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Director of Arigatou International New York.

important recommendations for different groups of stakeholders, including fostering interreligious dialogue as a way to facilitate the protection and promotion of children rights. Prof. Goonesekere concluded presenting the policy brief with the specific recommendations to strengthen partnerships between religious communities and governments on advancing the implementation of the CRC and strengthening child protection.

The event continued with an interactive panel discussion with Child Rights experts and religious leaders, moderated by Mrs. Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Director of Arigatou International New York.

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches highlighted the Churches' commitments to Children as a

concrete example to strengthen the actions with children and to improve child safeguarding, challenging those harmful norms that condone violence. He highlighted the need for religious communities to be self-critical and to repent and find innovative strategies to strengthen child protection. This includes empowering children and young people giving them agency: 'this has to be part of the duty of faith'.

Rabbi David Rosen, International Director, Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee and Member of Arigatou International Advisory Group reflected on the importance of the interpretation of religious texts about the issue of religion and violence. He explained how in some cases religion has been used to justify violence and how there is a need to challenge these negative interpretations of religion with positive articulations that

construct alternative approaches. Particularly for the promotion and protection of children's rights, he argued for the need to develop an innovative methodology to work with faith communities to promote positive change: a methodology that looks at the long-term goals and at how these goals are best served by non-violent approaches. This is particularly the case for challenging violent discipline and corporate punishment: 'if we present the scientific facts about the negative effects of corporal punishment in the long-term development of children, we can engage faith communities to transform this practice'. It is crucial to use a positive approach in the engagement and to also use the scientific evidence, when available.

Sheikh Mohammad Abu Zaid, Senior Judge of Saida Islamic Sunni Court in Lebanon continued the discussion reflecting on concrete opportunities for finding common ground across different faiths for the promotion and protection of child rights. He highlighted the need to strengthen interfaith partnerships and collaboration between institutions, including partnering with governments to deepen the understanding of child rights among different stakeholders and to challenge the narratives that oppose religion to child rights, instead raising awareness about the complementarity of child rights and religion and the importance for faith actors and governments to work together to strengthen child protection and safeguarding at the local and national levels. Sheikh Abu Zaid emphasized the importance of developing a common strategy that can mobilize concrete actions among several stakeholders.

Dr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and former Chair, highlighted how the Convention



Ms. Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia.

of the Rights of the Child cherishes the right to freedom of religion and promotes spiritual development as essential for the holistic development of the child. Dr. Mezmur recalled the different ways in which faith communities contribute to the implementation of the Convention but he also called for faith communities to be more involved, for example, with the State Reporting to the Convention where the voices of faith communities could be included more systemically by the States. Complaints regarding children's rights, he mentions, at times have a religious connotation, and there is a need for the Committee to engage religious communities to better understand these issues. Dr. Mezmur emphasized, through several examples, the important role religious communities have played in safeguarding children's rights.

The discussion concluded with final reflections and ideas to follow-up to the multi-religious study. Panellists shared concrete ideas, including the possibility to continue to work together to raise awareness about the complementarity of child rights and religion. Joining hands to strengthen interfaith collaborations in child rights education, as well as working closely with the Committee on the



Amb. Alvaro Albacete, Deputy Secretary General of KAICIID.

Rights of the Child to integrate the perspective of religious communities in the reporting of States to the Committee.

Amb. Alvaro Albacete, Deputy Secretary General of KAICIID, and Mrs. Daniela Buzducea, Vice President for Advocacy and External engagement of World Vision International, endorsed the study on behalf of their organizations and committed to its dissemination among their constituencies.

The launch event continued with a reception where children shared their remarks and recommendations. Children views have been included in the multi-religious studies as regional consultations with children in seven countries were conducted during the drafting of the study.

In this light Lamija, child delegate from Bosnia & Herzegovina and Representative of the Global Network of Religions for Children, shared about how the study can help strengthen interfaith collaborations in her community, particularly between Muslim and Christians as part of the efforts of building cohesion on societies after the conflict.

Sameer, child delegate from Pakistan and Representative of Search for Justice as well as Member of the Global Network of Religions for Children, highlighted how the Study is a powerful tool for religious communities to strengthen their work on the protection of the rights of the child, opening spaces for dialogue with religious leaders about the continuity between religion and child rights.

Carlos, child delegate from Brazil and Representative from World Vision International, recalled the fundamental role played by religious communities in Brazil, particularly in terms of reaching out to those most marginalized and providing services to the most vulnerable children in the country, for this reason, Carlos highlighted that in order to strengthen child protection and child rights in Brazil, child rights activists and practitioners, children and faith leaders, need to join efforts and to speak with a united voice against violence and abuse of children.

The reception followed with the closing remarks by H.E. Mr. Raúl Heredia, Deputy Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations in Geneva, and H.E. Mr. Michel Veuthey, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations in Geneva, who spoke about the importance of working closely with religious communities to address the most imperative needs of children today and their commitment to continue upholding and affirming children's rights.

Mr. Hironari Miyamoto, Manager of Headquarters Operations at Arigatou International, closed the event with a vote of thanks to all partners and participants, and invite them to launch a new decade of even greater collaboration among all sectors of society to safeguard, promote and advance the rights of children. Mr. Hironari expressed his hope that the study will help to bring people together, forge new and exciting partnerships between organizations that did not collaborate before, and ultimately help to generate an "All for Children" movement devoted to the vision



Mr. Hironari Miyamoto, Manager of Headquarters Operations at Arigatou International.



Rabbi Diana Gerson receiving a copy of the Study from Sameer, child delegate from Pakistan.

of every child's inherent dignity and right to pursue all the meaning and joy that life has to offer.

The launch event concluded with the children delegates honouring the faith leaders of all faiths present at the event with a copy of the Study. Faith leaders committed to take action and promoted interfaith efforts to strengthened the implementation of children's rights in their communities.



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**“May every day find every
one of us continually
embraced in growing peace”**

*—Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President of Arigatou
International, September 21, 2015*