



## Ending Violence in Early Childhood Working Together with Religious Communities

*Side event at the margins of the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, March 2018*

Draft concept note - 2 March 2018

Date: 8 March 2018 – 13.00 – 14.30 – Room XXIII Palais des Nations

Co-organized by Arigatou International Geneva, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, World Council of Churches, World Vision, UNICEF and the World Health Organization

Co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations, the Permanent Delegation of the EU, the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations, the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations, and the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations.

Early childhood is a critical developmental stage when children and youth learn the foundations of respect, empathy, solidarity, and to trust one another. In its preamble, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. As with all groups of children, young children are holders of all the rights enshrined in the CRC, including the right to special protection and the right to life, survival and development to the maximum extent possible.

The creation of safe environments during early years can help nurture the brain and allow children to learn about life and relate with others. “It is during early years that the child’s brain architecture is developing most rapidly, habits are formed, differences are recognized and emotional ties are built through positive social relationships and day to day interactions in homes and neighborhoods”<sup>1</sup>.

There is a growing recognition that protecting, promoting and supporting children in their early years is essential for the transformation that the world seeks to achieve in the next 15 years guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and the ECD Action Network are developing a global Nurturing Care framework for early childhood development that brings together essential actions across health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and early learning. The framework will be launched at the time of the World Health Assembly in May 2018, in support of the Survive, Thrive and Transform goals of the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health.

Children thrive and grow in trusting relationships with people who love and care for them. Ideally, and for the most part, this happens within their homes. Sadly, it also cannot be denied that the home is the

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, Early Childhood and Peacebuilding. UNICEF (Online) 2013. [http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index\\_69852.html](http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_69852.html)

place where most abuses occur. According to the most recent UNICEF report, close to 300 million (3 in 4) children aged 2 to 4 worldwide experience violent discipline by their caregivers on a regular basis; and 250 million children (around 6 in 10) are punished by physical means. Countless young children are victims of harmful practices every year, including female genital mutilation.

Violence against children violates children's physical and emotional wellbeing as well as their spiritual safety and development, as it breaks their connections with others, and their sense of trust and respect for other human beings.

The World Health Organization developed in 2016, INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children that identifies a select group of strategies that have shown success in reducing violence against children. Among these proved strategies are enactment of legislation that prohibits all forms of violence against children; challenging norms and values that justify violence against children as well as providing support to parents and caregivers. There is evolving evidence that suggests harmful social norms and attitudes can be changed by strengthening norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive and gender equitable relationships for all children and adolescents<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, The **Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children**<sup>3</sup>, led by the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), provides a strategic framework for collaboration among religious and spiritual communities, UN agencies, international and multilateral organizations, governments, civil society, the private sector, media — and, most importantly, with children.

As States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Governments play an indispensable role in developing and enacting laws, well-resourced and coordinated policies and child protection systems that effectively prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children. Religious communities are critical partners in raising awareness, challenging the culture of silence, empowering children and supporting families.

Across regions, religious leaders are helping to create safe environments for children, challenge social and cultural norms that justify violence against children, and self-examine their own theological interpretations that can influence the upbringing of the child.

Religious leaders are well positioned to support caregivers to use parenting practices that are conducive to the healthy development of the child, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. They can engage in formal advocacy, but perhaps their most powerful role is in facilitating dialogue, reflection and action regarding violence and rights violations within their cultural and religious contexts.

#### Objectives

1. Discuss and share knowledge on the extent and nature of violence in early childhood;
2. Identify concrete actions and share good practices to challenge cultural and social norms that justify violence against children in child upbringing;
3. Reflect on the role of religious communities to challenge social and cultural norms that justify violence against children;
4. Identify policies and programs that can help ending violence in early childhood and support the creation of safe and nurturing environments for children.

**Moderator:** Mr. Peter Prove, Director Commission of the Churches on International Affairs - World Council of Churches

#### Panelists:

- Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children
- H.E. Archbishop Job of Telmessos, Permanent Representative, Ecumenical Patriarchate Permanent Delegation to the World Council Of Churches
- Dr. Etienne Krug, Director Management of Non communicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention

---

<sup>2</sup> WHO, INSPIRE – Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children. Pg. 36.  
<http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/207717/1/9789241565356-eng.pdf?ua=1>

<sup>3</sup> Adopted in Panama City, 9-11 May 2017.

<http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/2017/Panama%20Declaration%202017.pdf>

- Miss. Neelan Fida, Global Child Protection & Inclusion Advisor, Islamic Relief Worldwide
- Mr. Aaron Greenberg, Regional Child Protection Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
- Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe, Director Arigatou International Geneva