



PREVIEW

Faith and Children's Rights:

A Multi-religious Study on the
Convention on the Rights of the Child

Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Arigatou International is pleased to share a preview of our forthcoming study, *Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The study will be launched on November 20, 2019, on the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. The study was developed in collaboration with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, UNICEF, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and with the support of partners, World Vision and KAICIID.



INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, most families and religious communities share a common vision: They envisage a world in which their children are protected from violence; have the care necessary to ensure their well-being and are guaranteed access to education, as well as opportunities that will enable them to realize their full potential. This vision also recognizes children as full members of society with a right to participate in all matters that affect their lives and have their views taken into account in accordance with their level of maturity. This vision is embraced by the world's major religions and is the foundation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most comprehensive international treaty on the rights of children.

The CRC was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and has been ratified by virtually all Member States of the United Nations. The CRC's 30th Anniversary will be celebrated at a time when the world is facing critical challenges that are having a profound effect on many children—climate change, rise of extreme and violent ideologies, massive migration and forced displacement of millions of families, growing inequality, and new threats such as online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Because religious leaders and communities represent an influential sector of society, Arigatou International commissioned

this multi-religious study to examine the important role they have played in the past and continue to play in advancing the rights and well-being of children. It thus proposes to this important sector of society the added value of using the CRC as a key guide and advocacy tool in all their actions with and concerning children.

The study will:

- highlight the important roles played by religious leaders and religious groups, from the drafting of the CRC to its ratification and implementation;
- present the ways in which the world's seven major religions affirm the dignity of the child and reflect on how some of their values are in harmony with the CRC;
- document the work by religious leaders, religious groups and faith-inspired organizations that provide care and protection for children;
- clarify some of the issues that have been raised by some religious groups regarding the CRC, including areas of non-compliance; and,
- encourage further implementation of the CRC, as a key tool for addressing the many threats facing children today.

The study discusses the foundational values of the CRC and reflects on the shared values found in the tenets of seven religions namely, the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and the Sikh Faith. Together they represent more than 5.5 billion people and are widely regarded as the world's major religions, based on their number of followers, and/or antiquity and leadership roles at local, national and international levels.

The study shows that in practice there have been many shortcomings in the fulfillment of both children's rights and religious tenets regarding the well-being of children, including harmful practices against children by some who purport to act in the name of religion. However, the important advocacy work of religious groups over the last thirty years is highlighted and includes the 1990 Princeton Conference where religious leaders of diverse traditions met for the first time to endorse the adoption of the CRC by the UN General Assembly. In 2017, the 5th Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children on Ending Violence Against Children held in Panama affirmed "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."

The study identifies a number of achievements and good practices by religious communities that are in keeping with children's rights and are producing results for the well-being of children in many parts of the world but which are not already well known. The fact that many of these efforts have been carried out in an interfaith

manner suggests a growing understanding of the shared religious values inherent in children's rights, as well as increasing recognition by different religious groups that they can enhance their impact by collaborating with others and speaking with a common voice.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The study was developed in consultation with leaders from the seven major religions, legal scholars, religious scholars, representatives of faith-based organizations and child rights experts. Regional interfaith consultations were held in different parts of the world to ensure diverse inputs and contributions are included in the study, and more are planned. Interfaith focus groups with children and youth were carried out in seven countries in order to include their views and opinions.

The consultation process revealed the need for profound theological reflection on religious practices and how they affect children's well-being and overall development. Furthermore, religious leaders and local religious communities need to be included as partners by policymakers, development practitioners, child-focused NGOs and others, from the beginning when programs and strategies are being developed. This is suggested as good practice because it helps to build trusting relationships with this influential sector of society and recognizes their long record of valuable contributions to children's well-being long before the CRC came into existence.

SELECTED FINDINGS FROM THE FORTHCOMING STUDY



1. The world's major religions share a great deal in common with human rights and children's rights, as set out in the CRC. In-depth analysis reveals a strong complementarity between children's rights and religious teachings, despite the different language and terminology. This common ground is not well known by religious groups or by advocates of children's rights.
2. The sanctity and dignity of human life is at the heart of the world's major religions and is also enshrined by the body of international human rights instruments. Similarly, the key principles of *interdependence*, *universality*, *indivisibility of rights*, *non-discrimination* and *equality* found in all the human rights instruments, including the CRC, are rooted in values that are common to the world's major religions.
3. Around the globe today and throughout history, there are, and have been, practices and actions that are deeply inconsistent with the fundamental values of the world's major religions and children's rights. Religious leaders and local religious communities have shown that they can be effective agents of change by influencing attitudes and behaviors that are in keeping with religious tenets and the CRC. They are also well positioned to advocate for positive social norms and contribute to the prevention of many forms of violence against children, such as corporal punishment, child marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.
4. Religious leaders can also help to strengthen the nurturing care that children need by influencing positive

child-rearing policies, and fostering values and spirituality that are fundamental for children's overall development and well-being. The combination of religious tenets and the legal framework can be a powerful argument in preventing harmful practices and advocating for positive social norms.



5. Because religious leaders are highly influential in their communities and many are well-respected public figures, they can also serve as strong advocates on policies and programs regarding child well-being—such as in the areas of health, education, child protection and child participation. Nevertheless, the regional interfaith consultations revealed that most religious leaders are not familiar with the CRC and are unaware that it can serve as a critical tool for improving the lives of children and urging governments to adopt child-friendly policies, programs and budgets.
6. The CRC recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and

social development (Art.27). The explicit reference to spiritual, moral and social development is not well known, particularly among religious communities. Religious leaders and local religious communities can play a more active role in promoting this right by supporting the holistic development of children, enhancing education that helps to develop children's spirituality and ethical values, as well as influencing parents and caregivers through their teachings, counselling and community work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Faith and Children's Rights* study will recommend key actions aimed at religious leaders and local religious communities to inspire initiatives concerning children that will help to make their rights and well-being a reality for **all** children. Recommendations specifically for children's rights advocates, national governments, and other key stakeholders will also be included.





ULTIMATE GOAL

Ideally, the study will encourage further reflection and lead to constructive dialogue among religious leaders of diverse traditions, human rights advocates and child protection practitioners, thereby strengthening collaborations and building solidarity that are focused on “All for Children.” The ultimate goal of the study is for the CRC and, more broadly, children’s rights, to be regarded as effective guiding references for religious leaders of diverse traditions, local religious communities and even for families, to help bring about a world in which children can realize their full potential in an environment that is safe and nurturing.



***“Every religion preaches
that every single person is
God’s child and that we all are
one big family.”***

**—Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist children
aged 14-17 (Sri Lanka)**

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