

Statement on Faith in Action for Children

Taking Action Together for Children in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

Greatly concerned by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of children around the world, we, the participants of the **Global Week of Faith in Action for Children**, have issued this Statement.

We are children, young people and religious leaders from more than 53 countries, who, together with representatives of the United Nations, international, national and grassroots organizations, and diverse experts, gathered November 16-20, 2020 for the online Global Week of Faith in Action for Children organized by Arigatou International and partners.

Children and the COVID-19 pandemic

Children of all ages have been among the most vulnerable to the damage and disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated the challenges that prevent children, especially those most vulnerable, from enjoying their rights. Children themselves tell us — and research confirms — that they are suffering grievously from the loss of family members to the pandemic, a serious disruption of school life, an alarming increase in various forms of violence against them, a noticeable deepening of poverty, the devastating impact the pandemic is having on the adults in their lives, as well as the divisive and, at times, competing narratives and misleading information about how to stay safe during the pandemic.

Children who were already disadvantaged by poverty and more vulnerable are being affected even more gravely, and their very development and even survival are threatened. Many experts predict that the Covid-19 pandemic will have a variety of long-term impacts with lasting negative consequences for their mental health, socio-emotional growth, and spiritual well-being. In particular, we are concerned that the spiritual well-being of children is not often considered in education, psycho-social support or social protection programs.

Children are the priceless treasure of humanity and the inheritors of the earth. The potentially irreversible damage to children's lives we are witnessing is not only unacceptable in and of itself; it also puts the future of humanity at greater risk. Yet, sadly, children continue to remain largely invisible and absent in the global community's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also wholeheartedly affirm that children have a unique and essential role to play, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, in building a better world — a world where the human dignity of each and every person is recognized and respected. To this end, it is imperative

that we all work together in solidarity to transform the divisions, inequities and injustices in all of our societies.

Children's Proposals

We, the children and young people who participated in this Global Week, have shared our ideas and insights, helping to shape this Statement. The following summarizes many of our proposals:

- Listen with an open heart to us, talk with, support and motivate us in these challenging times.
- Create ways to continue to stay in contact with us despite the disruptions, be creative to ensure that none of us feels isolated or unsupported, even if we cannot connect using technology.
- Help us to find coping mechanisms, and find ways to foster our imagination and creativity even during lockdown.
- Since many of our brothers and sisters have no access to daily nutritious meals, support the most vulnerable families, including with financial support and nutrition.
- Support parents and caregivers so they can cope with the "new normal," so they can better help us. We know that parents want to support us, but sometimes they do not know how.
- Make more opportunities for dialogue with parents, but also within faith communities and schools. As children, we look up to adults and would like to share our feelings, fears and dreams with them, but there is a need to improve communication.
- Let us explore the world peacefully because we are born to explore. While exploring the world we children can know what is wrong and what is right.
- Provide access to education to all children, without discrimination of race or ethnicity.
- Education must teach us to be good people and teach us about faith.
- Provide support to children victims of violence.
- Offer support for distance learning, particularly for those who do not have computers or internet at home.

Joint Commitment to Action

Informed by the children's proposals and our extensive dialogue over the past five days of the Global Week, we share a compelling determination to rise to the challenge of our times — to meet the ethical obligation to embrace solidarity, work together as one, and honor our innate interdependence and interconnectedness as human beings in all that we do. Toward this end, we, children, young people and religious leaders from more than 53 countries, who, together with representatives of the United Nations, international, national and grassroots organizations, and diverse experts, have agreed upon a set of collective actions.

We pledge to redefine the term, “new normal.” We will not yield to a pandemic-driven existence of isolation, deprivation, and disease. Instead, we will seize the opportunity provided by this crisis to promote the fundamental changes needed to ensure that each and every child — no matter their socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, religious background, or other factor — can grow and fully develop by helping to shape a more compassionate, just and sustainable world.

We collectively commit to the following actions:

1. Fulfil the *Panama Commitments on Ending Violence Against Children*, which consist of a set of 10 promises made by diverse religious leaders, children and young people, and representatives of civil society and faith-based organizations, at the Fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) held in Panama City in 2017.
2. Jointly implement evidence-based strategies to address the multidimensional impact of COVID-19 on children, thereby contributing to economic strengthening, supporting parents and caregivers, challenging harmful norms condoning violence against children and strengthening those that affirm children’s dignity and advance child sensitive social protection.
3. Promote child participation in all decisions that impact children and work hand in hand with them to create spaces and opportunities for joint solutions for the issues that affect them, focusing on areas of education including nurturing spirituality, prevention of violence against children and ending child poverty.
4. Be accountable to children in the implementation of our joint actions.
5. Listen to the advice of scientific and health experts to ensure that we share accurate health information on how to keep people safe, address religious and faith-related concerns, and promote the safety and protection of children and our communities.
6. Strengthen collaboration and coalition-building at the local level among religious communities and among FBOs, CSOs, multilateral organizations and grassroots and religious communities.

Endorsed by:

Arigatou International

Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace

International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)

Islamic Relief Worldwide

Norwegian Church Aid

Parliament of World’s Religions

Pastoral da Criança

Religions for Peace

Scholas Occurrentes

Shanti Ashram

UNICEF

World Council of Churches

World Vision International

Joined by:

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG/VAC)

Joint Learning Initiative On Faith And Local Communities (JLI)

World Bank Group