

Advocating for Children's Rights and Well-Being

An Interfaith Approach

ADVOCACY GUIDE

A Guide Jointly Developed by the
Prayer and Action for Children and
Global Network of Religions for Children
Initiatives of Arigatou International



Arigatou International is a non-profit organization which works to bring people from all walks of life together to build a better world for children. Arigatou International is “All for Children,” and draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to come together to address children’s issues.

Arigatou International develops and sustains unique multi-stakeholder initiatives designed to ensure that all children are protected and treated with dignity, all children’s rights are respected, and all children have the opportunity to freely pursue their full human potential. Involving diverse partners, these initiatives emphasize both grassroots action and international advocacy.

Arigatou International has great faith in children, who actively help shape its work. Young people are deeply respected, active partners in every Arigatou International initiative.

Across its four global initiatives, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), Ethics Education for Children (EEC), Prayer and Action for Children (PAC), and End Child Poverty (ECP), Arigatou International is guided by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and committed to contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the targets related to children.

“Children are the most precious treasure humanity has; they are the bearers of the future and the inheritors of the Earth. Yet, far too many of our children are victims of all forms of violence and struggle for their very survival in deplorable conditions in many parts of the world. As religious people, it is our moral responsibility to protect all children so that they can fulfill their whole human potential with dignity. This means protecting their right to physical, mental and spiritual development. This is the conviction that drove Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, then President of Myochikai, a Buddhist organization in Japan, to establish Arigatou International in 1990 and to launch the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in 2000.”

— Rev. Keishi Miyamoto
President, Arigatou International



AT A GLANCE



What is this publication?

A “how to” guide designed to encourage an interfaith approach to advocacy for children’s rights and well-being around the world.



What is it designed to do?

- To inspire and encourage the advocacy work of the GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations working to promote children’s rights and well-being;
- To offer a user-friendly interfaith approach to advocacy for children’s rights and well-being which builds on the meaning, value, and inter-connectedness of prayer and action; and
- To support the quality of faith-inspired advocacy for children and improve its outcomes at the local and national levels.



What are the desired outcomes of the approach to advocacy proposed in this guide?

- All children enjoy all their rights;
- All children enjoy physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being;
- The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.



Who developed this guide to interfaith approach to advocacy, and how?

Arigatou International’s Prayer and Action for Children and Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) initiatives, in consultation with GNRC members in five world regions as well as Arigatou International’s Ethics Education for Children and End Child Poverty initiatives.



Who is this guide for?

GNRC members, and faith-inspired organizations.



Why was it developed?

To support advocacy efforts to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and to keep children at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



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Arigatou International Staff

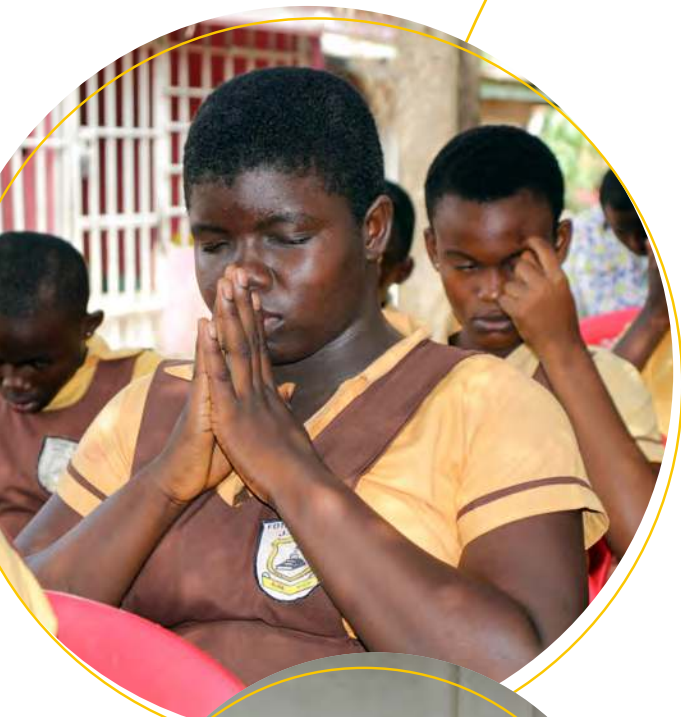
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ACRONYMS

EEC – Ethics Education for Children

ECP – End Child Poverty

GNRC – Global Network of Religions for Children

PAC – Prayer and Action for Children

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

VAC – Violence Against Children





FOREWORD



Dr. Mustafa Ali, Secretary General, Global Network of Religions for Children, and Director, Arigatou International – Nairobi

Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Director, Prayer and Action for Children, and Director, Arigatou International – New York

We are pleased to present ***Advocating for Children's Rights and Well-Being: An Interfaith Approach***, which has been developed primarily for the members of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and faith-inspired organizations. It is our hope that it will provide practical guidance and tools to help you in preparing and managing your advocacy work. It was designed to encourage GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations to take action to further protect and promote the rights of all children and ensure their well-being.

The aim of the Guide is to support the faithful engagement of the GNRC members and other implementing partners in celebrating the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children every year on November 20. The timing of the World Day commemorates the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly on the same date in 1989. The World Day serves as a catalyst to improve the situation of children by engaging key stakeholders in concerted efforts to prevent and end violence against children.



The Guide builds on the expertise, good practices, knowledge and wealth of experience shared by members of the GNRC, who represent diverse faith and religious traditions in different parts of the world. The Guide focuses in particular on fostering an interfaith approach to advocacy as an effective strategy to promote children's rights and generate opportunities for children to freely pursue their full human potential. The unique position that diverse religious leaders and faith communities have, especially when joining hands, to influence change at multiple levels is underscored, and the added value of an interfaith approach to advocacy for promoting children's rights and well-being is illustrated. The wide range of dynamic activities carried out by the GNRC and faith-inspired organizations, including those carried out on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, highlight the importance of interfaith collaboration for children, and this Guide is designed to support their work.

The Guide was developed to provide a better understanding of how to conduct effective advocacy through prayer and action, based on the premise that, for people of faith, prayer and action are intrinsic. It is further understood that prayer cultivates faith and mindfulness that can lead people to act for the common good by transforming

people's hearts to feel compassion. At the same time, action takes many forms and meanings, and for people of faith it is often manifested through service carried out individually or collectively. An interfaith approach to advocacy is thus encouraged to bring about transformative change for the common good.

In the year 2020, as the entire world faces the unprecedented challenges of a global pandemic, the GNRC celebrates 20 years since its inception, and the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children marks its 12th year. These are significant milestones that give us hope and inspiration to continue strengthening our collaborative efforts to build solidarity for the protection of all children.

Advocacy is an evolving and continuously changing process. This Guide is intended to be a useful resource that can help generate new experiences, fresh perspectives and lessons learned that we can all share and benefit from. We are grateful for the journey we have shared with the members of the GNRC, which led us to develop this Guide, and we look forward to continuing to live up to our pledge — *All for Children*.



Dr. Mustafa Ali
Secretary General of the Global Network
of Religions for Children



Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D.
Director, Prayer and Action for Children



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“When what we do is inspired by our faith, our action can be one more 'act' in line with the will of the Divine Presence. Likewise, in our faith, we believe that our prayers and meditative practices are not simply interior disciplines; they have an active influence on the outer world.”

— Rev. Keishi Miyamoto
President, Arigatou International



1. Introduction

In 2015, 193 countries — all the Member States of the United Nations — adopted “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,”¹ agreeing to 17 Sustainable Development Goals, accompanied by 169 specific targets, to be achieved by 2030. Then-United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described this historic agreement with these words: “It is a road map to ending global poverty, building a life of dignity for all and leaving no one behind. It is also a clarion call to work in partnership and intensify efforts to share prosperity, empower people’s livelihoods, ensure peace and heal our planet for the benefit of this and future generations.”² Firmly grounded in human rights standards and principles, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, in an interrelated and mutually reinforcing way. Crucially, the 2030 Agenda contains multiple targets related to children,³ including ending poverty, increasing access to quality education, achieving gender equality, promoting child participation, ending child labor, and eliminating all forms of violence against children.⁴ Of the 232 indicators for measuring target achievement, 35 are directly related to children.⁵ For the first time in history, the dignity of children and their right to live in a world free from violence has been made a clear priority of the international development agenda. The SDGs are a call to action to build a better world for all, a better world in which “no one will be left behind” — and for the first time ever, this explicitly includes children.





However, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted progress on the 2030 Agenda. During the pandemic, close to 90% of the world's school children have faced school closures, and many are living under quarantine. Reports indicate an increase in domestic violence and violence against children. Several factors are contributing to the increased violence, including higher levels of family stress, school and business closures, loss of income and economic vulnerability, family quarantine and isolation. Efforts to address the specific challenges children are facing due to the pandemic include Arigatou International's *Faith in Action for Children* campaign, which seeks to equip religious communities, families, and other key stakeholders to protect, support and empower children during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the campaign's key messages is that faith plays a critical role in emergency situations to strengthen resilience in children and young people, while protecting them and affirming their dignity.

This guide presents an interfaith approach to advocacy for children. It was jointly developed by two of Arigatou International's global initiatives: Prayer and Action for Children, and the Global Network of Religions for Children. The advocacy approach it describes is designed to inspire and equip faith communities and faith-inspired organizations — including members of the members of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) — to work together to promote children's rights and well-being.





This interfaith approach can be used not only to address the immediate challenges children face during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also, going forward, to contribute to progress on the larger 2030 Agenda by focusing efforts on all the crucial child-related goals, targets, and indicators. Overcoming the pandemic and building the better world envisioned by the 2030 Agenda is going to take action from everyone — not only national governments and United Nations agencies, but also the private sector, all sectors of civil society, and, critically, the billions of religious believers around the world. The GNRC, as a global interfaith network exclusively devoted to children's rights and well-being, has a unique opportunity to encourage and equip people of faith and good-will to help deliver the progress children need. A better world for children means a better world for everyone.

The interfaith approach to advocacy offered in this guide is meant to be practical and easy to use. It includes not only an advocacy model, but also numerous concrete suggestions and examples illustrating how GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations can advocate for children together. We hope the proposed approach adds value to the many outstanding advocacy efforts already underway to influence positive change in the lives of children, thereby contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, even in times of crisis.



CHAPTER 1 introduces the guide and its objectives, and provides an overview of the process that led to its development.

CHAPTER 2 explores the meaning of prayer, how it contributes to action for children in the world's major religions and other spiritual traditions, and how prayer and action are inter-connected.

CHAPTER 3 presents the interfaith approach to advocacy for children's rights and well-being developed by Prayer and Action and GNRC, and explains its three main components, the three levels of change it can influence. It also describes the five steps of the advocacy cycle and sets out a number of specific opportunities for getting involved in advocacy for children.

THE ANNEXES contain resources that complement the information provided in the main chapters.



This guide also comes with a [Companion Toolkit](#) full of practical tools that GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations can use to inform and develop their advocacy action plans.

GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations around the world are already making extraordinary efforts to build a better world for all children. The unique interfaith approach to advocacy in this guide draws on their wisdom and experience, and we hope it will help to equip new advocates, increase cooperation on common causes, and expand their influence for children far and wide.



1.1 Who this advocacy guide is for

This guide was developed for the GNRC members and organizations who come from diverse faith communities, spiritual traditions and faith-inspired organizations.

For practical purposes throughout this guide and companion toolkit, we will refer to them as the GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations.

Although the Guide is not specifically intended for children to read, it strongly encourages collaboration with children and young people and emphasizes the need to create opportunities and spaces for their ethical, safe, and meaningful participation in advocacy efforts. The guide comes with a companion toolkit of participatory activities designed to facilitate collaboration between adults and children when planning advocacy and carrying it out, which adhere to Arigatou International's [Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct](#).





1.2 What this advocacy guide is designed to do



The advocacy guide is designed to accomplish the following three objectives:

1

To inspire and encourage the advocacy work of GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations working to promote children's rights and well-being;

2

To offer a user-friendly interfaith approach to advocacy for children's rights and well-being which builds on the meaning, value, and inter-connectedness of prayer and action; and

3

To support the quality of faith-inspired advocacy for children and improve its outcomes at the local and national levels.

By contributing in these ways, it is our hope that this guide will help to build a world where all children enjoy all their rights, all children enjoy physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being, and the SDGs, including all the child-related targets, are achieved by 2030.



1.3 Why and how this advocacy guide for people of faith was developed

For people of faith, prayer and action are intrinsic to the spiritual journey, whether they conceive of them together or separately. Prayer cultivates faith and mindfulness, while expanding understanding of a common humanity in a process that calls people to act for the common good.⁶ However, prayer does not stop when action begins, and vice versa. Prayer can gradually transform people's hearts from an attitude of self-concern to compassion⁷ and deepen the spiritual dimension of actions to the point that those actions themselves become a form of prayer.⁸

Action takes many forms and meanings, and for people of faith it is often manifested through service carried out individually or collectively. Collaborative action occurs within and among faith communities and faith-inspired organizations — including multi-religious coalitions and interfaith networks — as well as between faith communities and other non-faith groups and organizations. This process depends upon building trust through dialogue and respectful encounter among everyone involved. Efforts by faith communities and faith-inspired organizations to act collaboratively for the common good occur at local, national and international levels.

Advocacy is a type of action undertaken to bring about transformative change for the common good. Many different types of organizations and individuals are involved in advocacy efforts. Faith communities have historically been among the strongest advocates for children's dignity and well-being. Advocacy responds to the question of

what can be done to influence decisions to bring about transformative change. However, an important question that often arises is **how** to do it while retaining the unique voice and identity of each faith community.

The development of this guide was informed by consultations with GNRC members from five world regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East. The consulting GNRC members have significant organizational and personal wisdom and experience regarding how best to shape and carry out advocacy at the local level, tailoring it to their unique socio-political, economic and cultural contexts. They understand what enhances openness to dialogue and appreciate the special opportunities faith communities have to influence change. It is our hope that this guide will help to strengthen even further the outstanding existing advocacy efforts of GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations. It presents an advocacy approach shaped together — conceived and formulated based on their interfaith experiences and supporting their commitment as champions for children's rights and well-being.



1.4 Ethical considerations

Practice Inclusive and Respectful Dialogue

Arigatou International is committed to inclusive and respectful dialogue and collaboration with faith communities and civil society organizations, including respect for diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. This Advocacy Guide and its [companion toolkit](#) should not be used for purposes other than the three objectives described above in section 1.2.

Prioritize the Best Interests of the Child and Do No Harm

Arigatou International believes that all advocacy efforts, whether by an individual — such as a religious leader or community member — or by religious or secular groups, should promote and prioritize the principle of the best interests of the child in all actions that concern them (see Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child). We thus recommend that all advocacy efforts also adhere to a do-no-harm principle and consider any potential risks to children and unintended impact that participation in advocacy actions could bring to children's lives and their care environment and take steps to prevent them in all instances.

Put Child Safety First

Everyone who uses this Advocacy Guide is strongly requested to follow Arigatou International's [Child Safeguarding Policy](#) and [Code of Conduct](#), being sure to provide for ethical and effective participation of children that does no harm to any child, but rather ensures their safety at all times.





Chapter 1 Footnotes



1. United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

2. United Nations (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals officially adopted by 193 Countries at the Sustainable Development Summit*.

<http://www.un.org.cn/info/6/620.html>

3. This guide adopts the commonly accepted definition of “children” as any person 18 years of age or younger.

4. See: [United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children](#)

5. See: [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#)

6. Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children (2018). *How Prayer Can Help Build a Better World for Children*, New York, N.Y.

p.7. Retrieved from: <https://prayerandactionforchildren.org/images/zdocs/170-DAY-PAC-Information-Document-Design-online-fin.pdf>

7. Ibid, p. 4

8. Ibid, p. 18



CHAPTER 2

PRAYER AND ACTION FOR CHILDREN

"Pray, but when you pray,
move your feet."

— African proverb



2.1 The meaning and value of prayer and action in the world's major religions

At the heart of Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative — and the practice of prayer and action that it proposes — is a single goal: to preserve and honor the dignity of children in all actions that impact their lives within the family, school and broader society. As faith leaders, religious scholars and members of the GNRC have affirmed time and again, there is strong consensus found across the religious traditions affirming the inherent dignity of every person, including every child.

*In the groundbreaking statement of the GNRC First Forum in 2000, religious leaders from all the world's major faith traditions stated, "The ultimate and inviolable dignity of the child is understood to be rooted in reality by each religion in its own terms. Thus, the reality of the child expresses for each religion in its own way the mystery and meaning of human existence. Together, people of religious conviction agree that every child is promise, sacred gift, and pledge of the future. Our diverse religious visions shape our approaches to the child; they call us to repentance, hope, and commitment."*⁹

The belief that all human beings deserve to be respected and treated with dignity and without discrimination of any kind on the basis of race, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, socio-economic or other status is deeply embedded within all the major religions of the world. Compelling evidence of the universality of these values can be found in *Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*.¹⁰





As detailed in that study, the ethical values and principles that inspired the Prayer and Action for Children initiative and the GNRC are based on sacred religious teachings that are also in harmony with the rights of children as recognized in the universally accepted legal framework enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Among other important rights, the CRC establishes the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. According to Article 14 of the CRC, children have the right to practice their religion and parents should help to provide religious and moral guidance to their children. Article 27 further recognizes the child's right to spiritual development.

In this context, States Parties are prescribed the following duties in regard to the role of parents:

Art. 14 (2): "States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child..."

By participating in prayer and action for children, GNRC members and local faith communities can provide moral teachings and model practices for the care and protection of children based on universally accepted ethical values and principles. Faith communities can help to ensure respect for the freedom of religion or belief of children within their teachings and community practices, bearing in mind the status



of the child as a holder of human rights. The teaching and instruction provided to children should be given in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child in exercising his or her freedom of religion or belief, thus paying respect to the child as a human being with rights. This may include consideration of those who do not pray or adhere to any religious belief.

Actions to protect the dignity of all children may arise from and be inspired by prayer or other forms of worship, or encouraged by education and the promotion of ethical values, as emphasized by Arigatou International's Ethics Education for Children (EEC) initiative. The EEC initiative aims to nurture values through ethics education as a means of empowering children in order to create a world of greater justice, peace and dignity. It envisions a world where children are equipped to make ethical decisions, to nurture their spirituality and to transform their communities together, based on values that promote respect for their own and others' cultures and beliefs. Arigatou International's fourth child-centered global initiative, End Child Poverty, seeks to mobilize faith-inspired resources to address the spiritual root causes of poverty and challenge its structural root causes — promoting theological reflection, prayer and action; inter-faith advocacy and lobbying; and replicable, sustainable grassroots projects that alleviate child poverty. Openness to spirituality, strong commitment to children, and open cooperation with all people of good-will — faith-based or not — are hallmarks of all of Arigatou International's work.





There are many definitions of prayer, and various forms of worship and meditation practiced by the world's diverse religious and faith traditions, but there are many common threads found across traditions. For people of faith, prayer and meditation are powerful, both for the one who practices them and for the world in which he or she lives. The practice of prayer, whatever its form, including meditation and reflection, transcends generations, cultures, and barriers. [...] Prayer, especially when considered in the light of our common human call and responsibility to care for our neighbor, as we would like him or her to care for us, is ultimately about cultivating our connection with the presence of the Divine.¹¹

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations, scholars and theologians place high value on including action in the prayerful and spiritual life of their communities. Scriptures and holy writings from diverse religious traditions tell us that prayer leads us to the knowledge that we are inter-connected and to an awareness of the needs of others, that prayer removes negative character traits, that acts of kindness to others in need will be rewarded, that believers must be intentional about the words of their prayers and meet the obligations therein,¹² and that service is prayerful action.

Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International, writes:

Is our action guided and shaped by our prayer and meditation? Is our prayer and meditation motivated by compassion for the suffering around us, or in other words, infused with a commitment to action?

When we are at our best, every action is a prayer, and every prayer is an action. I think this may be a good way to sum up what we mean when we say “faith-based” approaches to problem-solving, to living. [...] Likewise, in our faith, we believe that our prayers and meditative practices are not simply interior disciplines; they have an active influence on the outer world. [...]

While turning to prayer and meditation, we are compelled to act, to do absolutely everything we can, everything in our power, to eliminate the violence against children in our world today. [...] So, in this sense, our prayer and action for children is motivated by both the joy of gratitude, with its vision of all that life could be for children, and the heart-rending compassion we experience when we see children suffering.¹³



In diverse faiths and religions we find scriptural and other writings that convey the importance and the value of both prayer — which leads to strengthening and deepening the prayer life of the self and the community — and action — which leads to the care of others and interest in their well-being, and which is expected of members of that faith community. Below are some extracts from diverse holy scriptures, writings, and sayings which illustrate and promote the inter-connectedness of prayer and action:



Bahá'í Faith

"... is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good."¹⁴

"Therefore, strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!"¹⁵



Buddhism

“Change only takes place through action” and “frankly speaking, not through prayer or meditation, but through action.”¹⁶

— The Dalai Lama

“We open our hearts to those around us, to recognize that all share in our suffering, to respond to others with friendship and care, no matter who they are, and to cultivate traits of character that enable us to reduce the suffering of others and of ourselves.” [...] One approach is to cultivate what Buddhist ethicists call the “six perfections,” and these are: **generosity**, so we may be of material, emotional, and social assistance to those around us; cultivate careful **attention** to the needs of others; by cultivating **patience** we reduce our tendency to anger or to despair, and enable ourselves to work calmly, and to respond effectively to the needs around us; by developing the **resolution** that enables serious effort, we ensure that we do not lose hope or heart; taking time to **contemplate** is important; [...] we each need time in the day to reflect, to gather our thoughts, to fix our resolve, and to remember who we are, and to what we are committed; and this in turn allows us to develop the **wisdom** to be effective for ourselves and for others.”¹⁷

Christianity

“Prayer that doesn’t lead to concrete action toward our brothers is a fruitless and incomplete prayer. But at the same time, when ecclesial service only attends to work, not reserving time for dialogue with God in prayer, it risks serving itself rather than God who is present in the brother in need. Prayer and action must always be profoundly united.”¹⁸

— Pope Francis

“We believe that faith without works is dead. It’s not enough to just pray. We do believe in the power of prayer, but we believe there needs to be action behind that prayer so that we can begin to do the work that needs to be done, particularly for our children.”¹⁹

— Rev. Bishop Victor Rush, Christian Pentecostal Church, Hartford, USA



Hinduism

"The profound value for the child in Hinduism matters very little unless it leads to practices that nurture and foster the flourishing of the child. [...] [For example,] it must find expression in the eradication of the sexual exploitation and physical abuse of children. These are gross violations of the cardinal Hindu ethical principle of non-injury, or *ahimsa*."²⁰

— Dr. Anantanand Rambachan, St. Olaf College

Islam

"...alms-giving, or *zakat*, is mandatory in Islam. [...] In the Quran, it is said that "those who believe and do deeds of righteousness and establish regular prayers and regular charity will have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve." (2:277) Muslims understand that no prayers can be accepted without offering *zakat*. The underlying principle and value of *zakat* is that everything on Earth belongs to God (Allah) and that we are entrusted with the wealth and well-being that God has given to us with the understanding that we will share this wealth and well-being freely and robustly with those most in need, who are all too often the children in our various communities."²¹



Judaism

“Pray as if everything depended on God, act as if everything depended on you. There is not one thing without the other. We must pray and act to protect the most vulnerable among us.”²²

— Rabbi Herb Brockman, Yale Divinity School

“Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city, but prayer can water an arid soul, and rebuild a weakened will. We must pray and act to protect the most vulnerable among us.”²³

— Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Sikh Faith

The Sikh worldview centers on the idea of oneness [...]

A natural corollary of recognizing the oneness of the world and practicing love is to serve the world around you. In the Sikh tradition, service is a way of expressing gratitude to the divine. Service is prayerful action. The concept of love-inspired service is called *seva*, and it is a core part of the Sikh tradition. All Sikhs are expected to serve humanity while also cultivating their own spirituality. The tradition calls on every Sikh to live as a *sant-sipa-hi*, a saint-soldier, who is committed to spiritual practice and to establishing a more just and equitable world.

The core beliefs outlined above help us understand the three daily principles of Sikhism: truthful living, service to humanity, and devotion to the divine.²⁴



Other faith and spiritual communities

Nawat indigenous peoples:

“For the Nawat peoples of Kuskatán (current El Salvador), specifically “indigenous” just since 2014, prayer is a fundamental part of life, it is favored by the daily cycles of day and night, by life cycles (such as rains, winds, astronomical phenomena) and the things that are happening in everyday life. We pray not only to ask, but to give thanks, to be well, to feel at peace with the community. All prayer is action in itself, since it requires preparing in attitude, looking for materials, often requesting the help of a spiritual guide. In prayer we are connected with our brothers and sisters in the community; it is a moment that although personal, is always communal.”

— Juliana Ama de Chile, social and spiritual leader of Nawat peoples from Izalco



2.2 Faith and children's rights²⁵



Long before children's rights were articulated and recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), religious groups were taking action for children based on the tenets of love, compassion, peace and non-violence. From the very beginning of the drafting of the CRC, some faith communities were actively involved in shaping its content, and some were instrumental in promoting its ratification. The sanctity and dignity of human life is at the heart of the world's major religions and is also enshrined in the body of international human rights law. Similarly, the key principles of universality, interrelatedness and 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. Many deeply held religious values are closely aligned with the principles and norms of the CRC. Both religious groups and others committed to promoting the implementation of the CRC prioritize actions that help secure child well-being.

The CRC and the world's major religions largely agree on these key points:

- A fundamental belief in the sanctity of life and the dignity of the child;
- An emphasis on the family as the best environment for bringing up children;
- The high priority given to children and the idea that all members of society have rights and duties toward them; and
- A holistic notion of the child and a comprehensive understanding of his or her physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs.





The CRC includes rights that all human beings are due, while also recognizing rights that are fundamental to childhood: birth registration; care and family relations; protection from violence; and protection in adoption and alternative care settings. In short, the rights enshrined in the CRC provide a framework for ensuring that every child can develop to his or her fullest potential — and the full realization of human potential is one of the core concerns of the world's religions.

The CRC explicitly refers to the child's "spiritual, moral and social development." The CRC thus offers more than a technical legal mandate; it represents an ethical blueprint for all sectors of society—including faith communities—to act upon.

Following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November 1989, and in recognition of the deep commonalities between religious values and the provisions of the CRC, the first global conference of religious leaders addressing the CRC was held in July 1990 in Princeton, New Jersey, organized by UNICEF and Religions for Peace. Inspired in part by the momentum of the promotion of children's rights, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) was launched in 2000 by 294 religious leaders and grassroots child-rights workers from the world's major religious traditions.

The rationale for the engagement of the GNRC in advocacy for children's rights is based upon:

- The need for collaborative efforts to advance children's rights and well-being and to contribute to reaching the goals and targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that no child is left behind and that boys and girls are given the voice and opportunity to claim their rights and shape their future.
- The unique role that faith communities and faith-inspired organizations play in advocacy. They are specially positioned to advocate for children's rights and well-being. The social and moral authority they have, the influence they wield, and the dialogue they can promote provide an effective and sustainable source of change for the benefit of children. Indeed, the GNRC builds on the access, social and spiritual capital of faith actors ²⁶ to increase the level of respect, protection and fulfillment of children's rights, at global, regional, national and local levels.



2.3 Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative

During the first-ever Special Session on Children of the United Nations General Assembly, held in 2002 in New York City, Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, the founder and president of the Arigatou Foundation (which was later renamed “Arigatou International”) and convener of the GNRC, addressed the Special Session and made three pledges to the General Assembly:

- (1) to create a Council on Global Ethics Education for Children to make the spiritual development of children an essential part of quality education;
- (2) to further strengthen the efforts to eradicate poverty and its root causes and;
- (3) to generate a universal moral force to propel the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ever since, Arigatou International has sought to fulfill these pledges.

The [Prayer and Action for Children initiative](#) was launched by Arigatou International in 2008 to fulfill Rev. Miyamoto's pledge to support the implementation of the CRC by people of faith all around the world. The initiative leads and coordinates the annual **World Day of Prayer and Action** for Children (hereafter, “World Day”) to draw attention to meaningful ways to promote the rights of children and protect them from all forms of violence. Celebrated every year on November 20th on Universal Children's Day and the anniversary of the adoption of the CRC, the World Day connects faith communities and civil society organizations in a common endeavor to protect children's dignity. The World Day has been celebrated with prayer and action — for and with children — through more than 600 activities and programs in over 100 countries around the world, and it continues to grow in impact and reach every year.

“As people of faith, we see the Divine Presence in every person, and thus it is our obligation to encourage each person, with patience and compassion, to realize the highest potential of the human heart. It is this Divine Presence—and this great potential—which are the eternal wellspring of the dignity of every child, indeed, of every one of us.”

— Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto,
Founder of Arigatou International



Over the years, the World Day has grown into a year-round prayer and action platform in which spiritual ceremonies and activities bring together children and adults from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to work towards a world where all children can learn, grow and flourish in safe environments, free from all forms of violence. Every year, members of the GNRC and many other partners commemorate the World Day by addressing issues affecting children, including: online and offline child sexual abuse and exploitation; school violence; physical and humiliating punishment of children; children on the move; and climate change. GNRC members often carry out actions on and around the World Day to influence stakeholders at various levels to achieve positive change for children.



“The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children for us is very important as it is the celebration of the work we do throughout the year. Although we always have an underlying message for the World Day—including child empowerment and child education—all of our program implementation is interfaith, bringing together African traditional religions and the seven main religions with a presence in South Africa.”

— Saydoon Nisa Sayed, GNRC Coordinator, South Africa



2.4 The Global Network of Religions for Children convened by Arigatou International

“Our religious traditions, cultures, economies, governments, societies, communities, and families are responsible for the well-being of our children. We must acknowledge where they have failed, and as religious persons we acknowledge in particular and repent for when our religious traditions have not put into practice their own deepest insights into the dignity of the child. Children are not objects. [...] All of our social institutions must be transformed and empowered to protect and care for, as well as nurture, our children as builders of society.”

— GNRC First Forum Statement

The [Global Network of Religions for Children](#) 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. They share a commitment to making the world a place where every child can enjoy not only the right to survive, but also to thrive, making positive contributions of his or her own to a world of peace and dignity for all.

The GNRC was inaugurated in May 2000 by a group of 294 religious leaders and grassroots child-rights workers representing all of the world’s major religious traditions and 33 different nations. Deeply concerned over the suffering of the world’s children, they gathered in Tokyo to launch the GNRC at the invitation of the Arigatou Foundation (now Arigatou International). The uniting force behind the Forum was the participants’ shared commitment to work together at both leadership and grassroots levels to fulfill the sacred responsibility to children embraced by all religious traditions. Arigatou International continues to support the GNRC as an expression of its commitment to promoting interfaith cooperation to build a better world for children.

Since its founding, the GNRC has played an important role not only in linking religious communities’ work for children with one another’s, but also with that of international agencies, governments, and other actors which do not necessarily operate from a faith-inspired perspective.



2.5 The meaning and value of interfaith prayer and action for children

Arigatou International recognizes and promotes the value added by the **inter-connectedness of prayer and action** in its work to encourage diverse faith communities and faith-inspired organizations to work together to protect all children's rights and bring an end to all forms of violence against children:

For centuries, churches, synagogues, Buddhist temples, ashrams, mosques, and other religious institutions have been involved in life-saving work for the common good of children. [...] Religious communities have a very particular understanding that to work for the common good requires consciousness of care, compassion, and empowerment of all children in every nation and every community. Many people believe that without this, it is simply not possible to work effectively for the common good.²⁷

Many of the great contributions made by particular faith communities and faith-inspired organizations to promoting children's rights and protecting them from violence are well known.²⁸ What is lesser appreciated is the significant value added when diverse religious communities come together to pray and take collaborative action, and how this specifically contributes to children's well-being and development.





Coming together to pray does not mean praying together nor praying the same.²⁹ Instead, it opens an opportunity to share the same place, and willingness to come together to share hope through diverse spiritual and religious experiences. The movement of kindness, respect, and solidarity behind interfaith prayers represents an enormous potential for fostering peace, reconciliation, and

commitment. When interfaith prayer and interfaith collaborative action for children occur, impact and reach can be greatly increased and deepened.

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children has increasingly shown the added value of interfaith collaboration for ending violence against children. In some contexts, it translates into advocacy opportunities to collaborate with faith communities, as well as with civil society organizations that may not be faith-based but share an interest in protecting children against violence. It is also reflected in increased awareness about the violence affecting children in the community, or in actions to influence policy-making processes that address children's rights.

"We collaborate with child-focused organizations and community-based organizations so that we can reach as many children as possible. We are addressing violent extremism because the region faces high numbers of child recruitment for extremist groups."

— Sheikh Ramadhan Aula, GNRC Coordinator, Kenya
(Center for Sustainable Conflict Resolution)



The spiritual, social, and access capital of faith communities and faith-inspired organizations can also play a key role in preventing violence against children by transforming existing cultural practices and beliefs that normalize and justify mental and physical violence.³⁰ At least 84% of the world's population has a religious affiliation,³¹ giving faith communities an important opportunity to influence social norms and to encourage, for example, behavioral change that promotes positive child-rearing practices as well as a safe, loving and caring environment for children's development. In several contexts, faith communities and faith-inspired organizations are among the few — if not the only ones — reaching the most vulnerable groups in locations where even national governments struggle (or do not attempt) to have a presence. The commitment of faith communities to protecting children from violence includes playing roles as peacekeepers, mediators, and spiritual guides, that when applied in collaboration with others, often result in stronger protection of children.

As noted in the study ***Faith and Children's Rights***:

In light of the positive role many religious groups play in their communities and within the family, and given their moral authority and extensive networks, there is much potential in strengthening dialogue between religious groups, on the one hand, and child-rights advocates, development workers, and humanitarian practitioners, on the other. They could explore common values and potential areas for collaboration and action on behalf of children. Such partnerships have already proven to be strategic and powerful for achieving results in health, education, and particularly in the protection of children against violence, exploitation and abuse. [...]

Expanding these partnerships would further strengthen the work of both religious groups and children's organizations dedicated to the realization of children's rights.³²



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CHAPTER 3

ADVOCACY FOR
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
AND WELL-BEING:

AN INTERFAITH APPROACH





3.1 A unique interfaith approach to advocacy for children

Advocacy for children

This guide uses the term “advocacy for children” in its broadest sense, for any systematic, organized action to influence changes in laws, policies, practices, social norms or systems, at any level, aiming to ensure that all children can enjoy all their rights and to preserve and promote their physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. This advocacy is a process that generates greater awareness and momentum around issues facing children that need more attention from decision-makers.

Arigatou International’s advocacy is guided by the common commitment across the world’s major religious traditions to the protection and care of children as well as the legal standards defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which extensively overlap when it comes to doing what is best for children. As described in chapter 2, many deeply-held religious values related to children are closely aligned with the principles and norms of the CRC.

Under international human rights law, States are the primary “duty-bearers” with responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children. However, the decisions, attitudes and actions of many other stakeholders dramatically affect children’s development and well-being. These include parents and guardians, community and religious leaders, educators, civil society organizations, the media, and the private sector. Influencing those decisions, attitudes and actions is key to bringing about sustainable improvement in

children’s lives. Additionally, empowering children and creating the spaces and conditions for them to claim their own rights and to hold their governments and other stakeholders accountable for their responsibility to children is also a duty shared by all sectors of society, including faith communities.





3.1.1 Interfaith collaboration as an approach to advocacy for children's rights and well-being

As an organization that promotes interfaith and intercultural collaboration for children's rights and well-being, Arigatou International encourages and supports advocacy for children in its diverse forms including multi-stakeholder, faith-inspired and interfaith advocacy.

The figure shown on the next two pages illustrates the interfaith approach to advocacy for children proposed in this Guide, and the rest of this chapter describes it thoroughly. This approach represents a way for diverse faith communities and faith-inspired organizations to express the inward, contemplative dimension of prayer and meditation, and the outward volitional dimension of action in joint efforts to catalyze sustainable and transformative change for children. Thus, "prayer" and "action" are seen as woven into every step of the process.

Chapter 2 described the inter-connectedness of prayer and action. Virtually every religious tradition calls for social justice in its sacred texts and mandates social action and support, frequently prioritizing marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including children. An interfaith approach to

advocacy is about bringing together faith communities and faith-inspired organizations of diverse religious and spiritual traditions to build upon this common call to service and put the values they have in common into action to drive positive change for children.





An Interfaith Approach to Advocacy for Children's Rights and Well-Being

Expressing the inward contemplative dimension of prayer and meditation and the outward volitional dimension of action, in joint efforts to catalyze sustainable and transformative change for children.

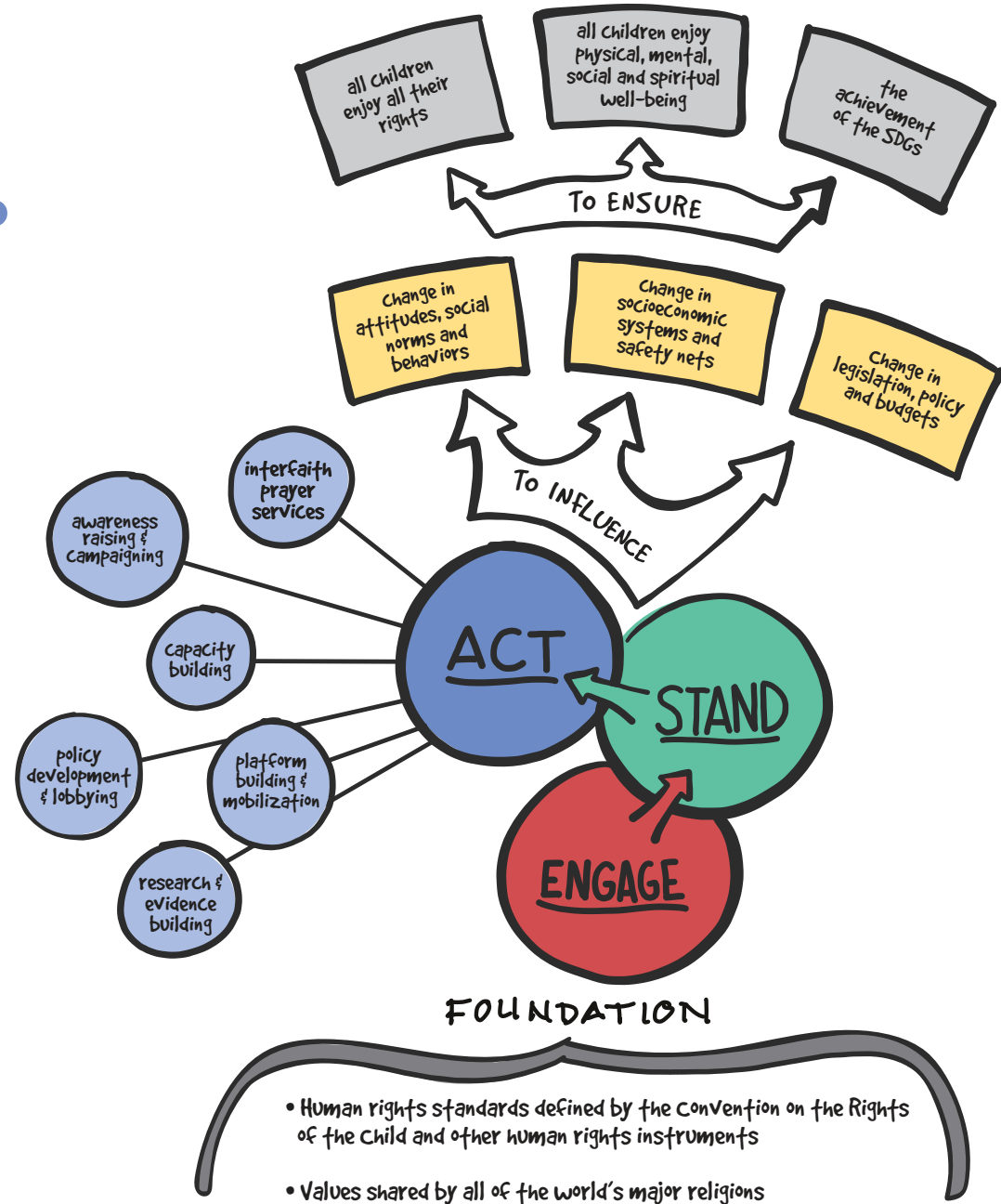


Figure 1.



The interfaith approach to advocacy in this guide is built upon the three main components shown in Figure 1 (**engaging** with other faith communities and faith-inspired organizations; **standing** together for a cause; and **acting** across or within faith communities to influence sustainable, transformative change for children at all three levels), it is a complex process that requires adaptation to diverse contexts. **It should not be seen as a one-off event.**

Additionally, **the advocacy work rarely if ever proceeds in a straight line**, as if moving in single steps from left to right in Figure 1. **Instead, it is a non-linear and iterative process.** Figure 2 illustrates how it is not only common, but also helpful and necessary, **to go back and forth several times during the advocacy process** — for instance to engage with and mobilize more faith communities or faith-inspired organizations, to reinforce the shared vision and common cause, or to add additional advocacy actions and tactics. The frequency and exact moments at which this will need to happen will depend on the local context and be shaped collaboratively by the participants involved.

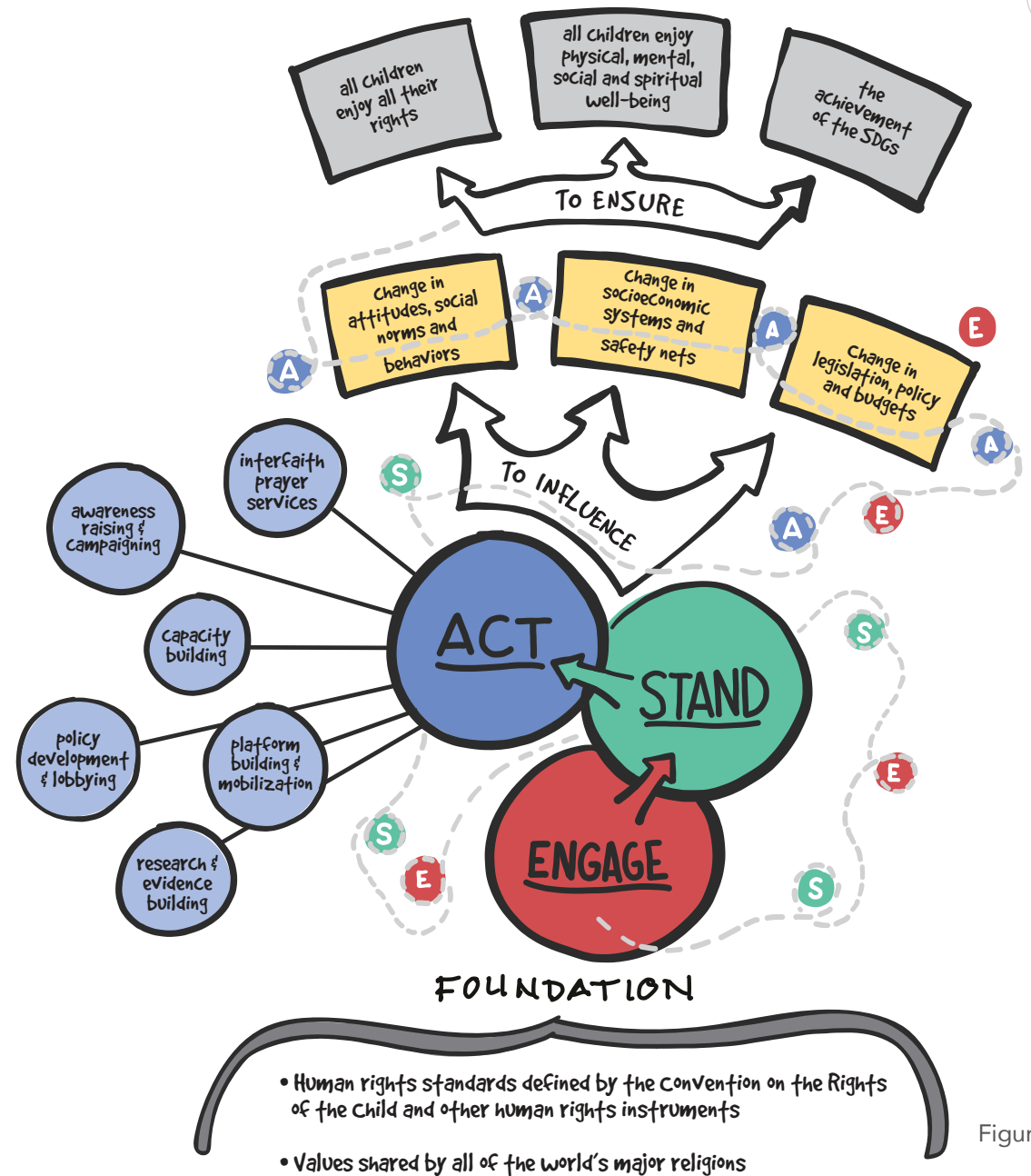


Figure 2.



3.1.2 Main components of the interfaith approach to advocacy for children

ENGAGE

Engaging with other faith communities and faith-inspired organizations: Broadening the support for children's rights and well-being

The first component is engaging with other faith communities and faith-inspired organizations, including religious leaders, to focus on children. It is about highlighting the shared responsibility we all have with regard to children's rights and well-being and, particularly, broadening the support for these from faith communities and faith-inspired organizations.

This shared responsibility implies:

- Encouraging the promotion and protection of children's rights by all stakeholders that have some level of responsibility (parents, teachers, community leaders, etc.), from a holistic perspective which includes children's spiritual well-being;
- Holding States accountable for breaches in children's rights by affirming the human dignity of each and every person, and by promoting spaces and opportunities for children to claim their rights; and

- Including the vital spiritual component that helps to transform not just actions but hearts.

Experience shows that as more faith communities and faith-inspired organizations get involved, others will want to join the effort, creating a so-called "snowball effect."





STAND

**Standing together for a cause:
Interfaith dialogue to develop a shared vision**

Arigatou International encourages interfaith efforts for children, meaning going beyond different denominations within a single religious tradition, to bring together two or more different faith traditions to take action together.

As a platform for interfaith collaboration for the rights and well-being of children, the GNRC is well-positioned to bring together diverse faith communities and faith-inspired organizations around common causes they embrace. This builds on the conviction that greater change is possible through interfaith collaboration and collective action. By encouraging interfaith dialogue, the common interests and shared values of the diverse faiths involved will emerge; trust and respect among the participants will be established; and a common narrative can then be developed, aimed at creating a more inclusive and sustainable world for children, where no boy or girl is left behind.



ACT

Acting across or within faith communities:
Collaborative efforts shaped by interfaith dialogue

The third component consists of collaborative efforts undertaken to influence sustainable, transformative change for the rights and well-being of children. This represents a move from interfaith dialogue into interfaith collaboration, motivated by faith in God, Nature, the Transcendent, or the Ultimate Reality. The action that emerges can take a variety of forms, including actions taken by individual faith communities, coordinated actions within multiple faith communities, or interfaith action where members of diverse faith communities come together to design and jointly implement an advocacy program or action.





3.1.3 Levels of change

The approach to advocacy proposed in this Guide calls for sustainable, transformative changes that help to ensure all children enjoy all of their rights. It takes into account the root causes of child-rights violations and children's lack of access to rights, and advocacy for the responses needed to address them. This includes addressing inequalities, unjust power relations, discriminatory social and cultural norms, and practices that negatively impact children's rights. It also entails children's empowerment to enable them to claim their rights and contribute freely and according to their evolving capacity to all matters that directly or indirectly affect them.

The approach focuses on influencing change at three levels, each of which is critical to promoting children's rights and well-being:



The levels of change are shown above, from Figure 1.



Children's participation

It is vital to note that this unique interfaith approach to advocacy encourages religious leaders, faith communities and faith-inspired organizations — in collaboration with any and all others working for the well-being of children — to act not only for children, but also with them, as explained in more detail in section 3.4 in the discussion of collaboration between adults and children. Their advocacy, with the involvement of children, can involve a wide variety of partners including both other faith-inspired groups and non-faith communities and organizations. Faith communities and faith-inspired organizations can play a very influential role, and as part of broader alliances and multi-stakeholder partnerships, their collective influence can be greatly magnified, leading to broader, more lasting outcomes (see the discussion of the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in section 3.4).



This approach to advocacy is designed to equip GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations to influence those who have the power or are well positioned to bring about the desired change at any or all of these three levels. There are many domains where change can occur, from the individual level of the child, to the household, to the community, and of course, to the national, regional and global. Effective advocacy efforts will also reach all sectors of society.

When interfaith collaborative action for children occurs, impact and reach increase. However, it should be noted that interfaith dialogue around a shared vision and cause may or may not lead to joint or collective action. In other words, actions may take different forms—actions *with* others (collective actions) or actions *within* each faith community that are still based on the shared vision developed through interfaith dialogue. Of course, individual communities and organizations can also work for children’s rights and well-being in various ways on their own.

“Our advocacy experience has been varied and positive. The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is a time of interfaith collaboration and concrete action to do things together. It is an opportunity to become aware that we are not alone. Before we thought it was all about convening many people, but over the years we have learned that the results in our context are better if the different communities celebrate independently and if we also convene a central event in which we come together to share and learn from the individual celebrations.”

— Larry Madrigal, GNRC Coordinator, El Salvador
(Centro San Bartolomé de las Casas)



Influencing change in attitudes, social norms, and behavior, including about and towards children

Change in
attitudes, social
norms and
behaviors

Attitudes, social norms and behaviors are key to realizing children's rights and well-being. The behavioral intentions of an individual are influenced by internal factors such as attitudes, as well as external factors such as social norms, which are defined as "what people in some group believe to be normal in the group, that is believed to be a typical action, an appropriate action or both."³³

Faith plays a significant role in the lives of a majority of the world's population, throughout the entire life course. It has a deep impact on personal and collective values and social norms,³⁴ which influence the way people behave. Faith communities and religious leaders are trusted and relied upon to provide advice and guidance and are therefore uniquely well-positioned to carry out advocacy to influence positive social and behavioral change that results in the well-being and protection of children.

For example, they could advocate for the elimination of harmful practices³⁵ such as child marriage or female genital mutilation, or advocate for the promotion of positive parenting practices and provide guidance to ensure a more caring and safer child rearing environment.





Change in socioeconomic systems and safety nets

Influencing change in socioeconomic systems and community safety nets

Effective advocacy should also result in changes to systems, particularly at the community level. This includes influencing changes that will strengthen people's personal, socioeconomic opportunities and assets (both internal and external), especially those that impact children's lives and well-being. It also includes influencing positive changes to community-based mechanisms that provide support for children and safety nets that help disadvantaged families nurture, protect and provide for their children. It is well documented that gaps in socioeconomic assets and access, such as income, education, employment, and/or weak community safety nets and social support have a magnified negative affect on children's lives.

An example of advocacy in this area could be to mobilize and influence community actors/leaders to build community safety nets for children based on a holistic perspective that includes their spiritual development and resilience, in order to promote children's rights, and/or to identify, refer, treat and manage violations of child rights.



Influencing change in legislation, policy and budgets

change in
legislation, policy
and budgets

When a State ratifies the CRC, it agrees to undertake all necessary legislative reforms to align its domestic legal system with the Convention. Once the normative framework is in place, the government develops and implements national policies, and puts in place programs and services to meet the human rights standards and fulfill children's rights. For that to happen, sufficient and adequate resources need to be allocated by the State to the relevant national institutions that cover health, education, and child protection, among others. Law enforcement is also as important as law development.

An interfaith approach to advocacy for children can thus focus on promoting a review of legal and policy frameworks, or on monitoring resource allocation and expenditure for children's rights, at national and/or decentralized levels, to make sure that these decisions are affirming the dignity of each and every child, while empowering children and the community to have a voice in the decisions that concern them. In most countries, there are already established coalitions of NGOs focused on child rights, who monitor the implementation process of the CRC and other international and regional standards related to children's rights.





There are several ways to engage effectively with selected United Nations human rights mechanisms and the international human rights system to advance children's rights at the national level. [Annex II](#) describes some of them.

The following two examples show ways to influence change in legislation, policy, and budgets.

- Advocating for legal reform to fully prohibit all forms of violence in all settings, including physical and humiliating punishment of children. This is key to raising the status of children in every society and improving how they are treated. It is not enough for States merely to declare that they respect children as rights-holders alongside adults; rather, they must take steps to implement the CRC including by undertaking a review of their laws and policies to ensure they are in harmony with the international legal standards of the CRC.
- Advocating for an increase in investment of funding in areas that especially affect children, particularly in early childhood, or increasing national budget allocation for inclusive and quality primary and secondary education for all.



3.2 Developing an advocacy strategy

3.2.1 The advocacy cycle

Advocacy efforts can look very different and can be carried out via a variety of different actions (lobbying, campaigning, online mobilization, etc.). Nonetheless, effective advocacy initiatives have common steps that are summarized in the advocacy cycle, as conceptualized by Save the Children (see Figure 3):

1. Identifying and prioritizing the advocacy issue
2. Analyzing the root causes
3. Identifying desired change, key stakeholders and partners
4. Advocacy action planning and implementation
5. Monitoring, learning and adapting

The following sections explore these five stages of the advocacy cycle, explaining how they are put into action in the proposed interfaith approach to advocacy.



“Advocacy is about mobilizing your constituencies to bring about changes affecting children. For example, sexual exploitation of children was our focus last year for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, and we did it by working with the Ghana police service, religious communities, and CBOs.”

— Emmanuel Ametepey, GNRC member, Ghana
(Youth Advocates Ghana)



Figure 3: Stages of the advocacy cycle (Adapted from Adocracy Matters, Save the Children, 2007)



1

Identifying and prioritizing the advocacy issue

The intended advocacy begins with an issue or a problem affecting children that GNRC members and/or faith-inspired organizations want to address. Selecting the issue implies identifying the multiple factors that influence the situation that needs to be changed. As an example of identifying and prioritizing an issue for advocacy, the Global Network of Religions for Children agreed to focus on ending violence against children at the GNRC 5th Forum held in Panama in 2017. Since then, GNRC members around the world have been focused on keeping the 10 Panama Commitments laid out in the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence against Children.

About the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children

The GNRC 5th Forum built on the work that GNRC members from diverse faith traditions had been doing since the year 2000, working for and with children, to build a better world for children. Working locally, nationally, and globally, GNRC members have addressed several of the key challenges facing children, prioritizing areas such as child rights, education, poverty, and violence. The Forum was attended by 64 children and 526 religious leaders, members of diverse faith communities, leaders of faith-inspired organizations, United Nations officials, and representatives of international and grassroots organizations, from 70 countries. Participants unanimously adopted the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children, making ten commitments that reaffirmed the key role that religious leaders, faith communities, and faith-inspired organizations have in preventing, healing, reducing and ultimately ending violence against children.





The 10 Panama Commitments:

1

Listen to children with empathy and respect, welcome their wisdom and gifts, and continue to work side-by-side to address violence against them;

2

Ensure that our religious places are safe for all children, and especially for the victims of violence and abuse, and vulnerable children such as those with disabilities;

3

Increase our personal and institutional commitments to take concrete actions to address the challenges voiced by children at this forum;

4

Educate our leaders and communities about the different forms of violence against children and deploy resources to prevent and address it within and beyond our communities; educate children about human sexuality and what they can do to keep themselves safe; work to safeguard children from harmful media content and engage the media in preventing violence against children;

5

Partner with global programs such as End Violence and make the most of existing tools for addressing the root causes and drivers of the violence children face, with a special focus on countering violent extremism, gang violence, harm to children by organized crime, and sexual exploitation and abuse;

6

Strengthen local communities by offering education in positive parenting and ethical values to help families and children develop empathy, become more resilient, and grow spiritually;

7

Identify and challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate violence against and sexual exploitation especially of girls;

8

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;

9

Strengthen cooperation and partnerships across Arigatou International initiatives, the wider religious and spiritual communities and strategic players at local, national, regional and global levels;

10

Work to generate greater social and political will for legislation, policies, and increased funding of programs to protect children from violence.



The faith communities and faith-inspired organizations represented by the GNRC, in deciding to focus on ending violence against children, took an important step toward mobilizing others and advocating for the prevention and elimination of violence against children. They built on the principle of shared responsibility with regard to children's rights and set the stage to broaden support from other faith communities and faith-inspired organizations, as well as civil society organizations, which is precisely what has been happening since 2017.

When identifying and prioritizing the advocacy issue for local action, it is important to assess what change would be most relevant based on the evidence available, the situation of the community or group that could benefit from the advocacy efforts, and the socio-political environment. Selecting and articulating clearly the advocacy issue locally is very important because it marks the route for action. As a route, the more specific and focused it is, the better chance there is to reach the destination.

Some questions that could support this reflection process include:

- *What forms of violence affect children the most in our community/city/nation? (e.g. sexual violence, domestic violence, school violence, other?)*
- *What changes could contribute to the prevention and elimination of these forms of violence against children?*
- *What is the unique role of faith communities and faith-inspired organizations in protecting children from this form of violence?*
- *How can our prayer and interfaith advocacy action specifically help to protect children from the forms of violence we aim to address?*
- *Why is this a good time to focus on these particular forms of violence?*
- *What are the risks associated with taking action on these particular forms of violence in our community/city/nation?*



2 Analyzing the root causes

The broad experience of GNRC members with local and national advocacy has shown that, while selecting an issue is important, it is just as important to explore, analyze and understand its underlying and root causes and effects. Once the problem is identified, it is key to ask: What are the causes of this problem facing children? It is useful to make a list of all the causes and then highlight those that can be changed or improved through advocacy.

Root causes respond to the *why* of the issue and could be related to multiple structural, cultural, social, historical, or economic factors, some of which may at times seem beyond our reach to transform. However, it is through this analysis that the best opportunities can be found to bring about positive change at one or more of the three levels of change: influencing change in attitudes, social norms, and behavior, including about and towards children; influencing change in socioeconomic systems and community safety nets; and/or influencing change in legislation, policy and budgets.

Many GNRC members addressing various forms of violence against children have been working for years on the root causes of the issue, hoping to foster the spiritual dimension of child development and mainstream the importance of honoring the dignity and preciousness of the child at all levels, including family, school, community, and

broader society. Analyzing the root causes of violence against children, for example, brings up opportunities to deepen reflection on the ecosystems in which children live; their dignity, well-being and development in today's world; and the evidence that reinforces the need and relevance of joint efforts to prevent and end violence against them.

Tip 1

Using **evidence-based approaches** to identify the advocacy issue, analyze the root causes, and develop key advocacy messages not only makes for greater eventual impact, but also increases opportunities to engage more substantially with diverse stakeholders that can influence change.



An Interfaith Guide to End Child Poverty: Inspire. Act. Change.

The primary aim of this Resource Guide is to mobilize faith-inspired resources to end Child Poverty. The guide was developed by Arigatou International's Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty — a multi-faith, child-centered, global initiative that mobilizes faith-inspired resources to end child poverty.

This guide has ten chapters, each dealing with a specific theme, analyzing and describing various aspects of child poverty, including its root causes. By looking into how different drivers can contribute to and exacerbate child poverty (including inequality, corruption, violence and violent conflicts, climate change and the environment), alongside other important aspects, the guide provides crucial insights into the role and relevance of faith-inspired resources in mitigating and ending child poverty.



3

Identifying desired change, key stakeholders and partners

The next step is to identify what needs to be done to change the situation. It is about exploring the overall vision for change; how that change will happen; and who has the power or is in the position to do something to bring about the desired change. In other words, this is when the advocacy team moves into the second component of the advocacy approach — encouraging diverse faith communities and faith-inspired organizations to discuss the change they would like to see and their common vision for the child, and what they can do together to help achieve a transformative change.

In advocacy, there are two important questions regarding the “who”:

1. *Who* would we like to influence to bring about the desired change (who do we want to see thinking or acting differently)?
2. *Who* do we want to partner with to influence that change?

Identifying stakeholders: *Who* we want to influence

To answer question 1, it is key to identify the person(s) or group(s) that have the power and credibility to bring about the desired change (the target of the advocacy actions). The decision on which ones to influence needs to be shaped by the relevance of the stakeholders, the opportunities to approach them, and the team’s capacity to address multiple groups. Specific targets of the advocacy actions can

include a variety of stakeholders, ranging from government officials and decision-makers, religious and spiritual leaders, public figures, community leaders, human rights defenders, and representatives of private businesses and corporations, to the media, international organizations, financial institutions, and beyond.

“Sometimes, people are skeptical to collaborate on issues to do with religion. This is not about indoctrinating but rather an opportunity to collaborate together for children. The communities and the schools were willing to participate in our World Day celebration once we were able to convey a clear understanding and purpose of our effort.”

— Emmanuel Ametepey, GNRC member, Ghana
(Youth Advocates Ghana)



It is also important to analyze who might either drive or attempt to block the desired change. As explained above, this approach to advocacy focuses on influencing change at three levels: attitudes, social norms, and behaviors; socioeconomic systems and community safety nets; and legislation, policy and budgets. There might be more than one change that needs to happen to overcome the issues or problems affecting children. The question will then be: What order do the changes — at these levels — need to occur to be most effective?

Ending violence against children, as an example advocacy issue, requires efforts to influence multiple stakeholders, but depending on how focused the local issue is, there may be one or more stakeholders that could play an especially significant role in preventing and ending violence against children. The opportunities to address key stakeholders are defined to a large extent by the socio-political climate and timing, the reliability and trust in the organization or group doing the advocacy, and the strategy for conveying the advocacy message. There are multiple ways to approach stakeholders (see step 4 of the advocacy cycle, below), but the most important is to address them with respect and to stay focused on the shared vision of the child that drives interfaith efforts at advocacy.

Tip 2

Mapping your target audience ensures that your key messages and actions are addressed to the right stakeholders with an increased probability of success. For the mapping consider the following questions (see the [companion toolkit](#) for a useful power mapping grid):

- *Who has the power to make the desired change happen?*
- *Who are the stakeholders, decision-makers, institutions or organizations with the potential to bring about the desired change?*
- *At what level(s) are key decisions concerning your advocacy issue being made? (e.g. government ministry, parliament, council, advisers, chiefs of units/departments, etc.)*
- *Through which decision-making processes, platforms, or settings could these stakeholders be reached?*
- *Who has more (or less) power and is likely to be more (or less) supportive of the desired change?*
- *Who could be the best messenger to convey the advocacy message to the target audience (e.g. religious leader, children, faith community member, etc.)?*



“Our program on communication for teachers to learn to communicate with children that is accredited by the Ministry of Education is based on our many years celebrating the World Day focused on school violence against children and alternatives to prevent it. After years working with children and teachers, we also started to approach parents, acknowledging that they play a key role in child-rearing, but sometimes it is not as easy.”

— Laura Molnar, GNRC member, Romania
(Education for Change)

In selecting the stakeholders to influence, it is important to consider who can best bring about the desired changes, and this should be done via the respectful process of encounter, dialogue and trust that precedes the interfaith action. The following table outlines some of the key stakeholders that GNRC members address and involve in their advocacy work. Depending on the context, these stakeholders can serve as targets (the “who” of question 1) or partners (the “who” of question 2) of the advocacy action.

GNRC member from India contributes to transforming social norms and behavior that justify violence against children

Every year, in the framework of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, GNRC member Shanti Ashram carries out a variety of actions addressing the structural and cultural causes of violence against children. One of them includes dialogue with adolescent boys about gender parity, violence against girls, shaping of societal values, and their role in transforming social norms and behavior that impair the safe and full enjoyment of their rights and those of others around them.

Other actions at this level include workshops for parents and caregivers on improving physical and mental well-being of adolescents, including the prevention of child sexual abuse and child safety in the digital world.



Stakeholder	Description
Religious leader	An individual recognized by a faith community as a spiritual guide and authority that represents the values of that community.
Faith Community	A group of people who share a particular set of religious beliefs, at different levels of commitment.
Faith-based organization (FBO)/ Faith-inspired organization	An organization whose values are based on (or inspired by) a faith that drives its mission and its manner of engagement with others. FBOs (as well as secular organizations) are also considered civil society organizations.
Civil society organizations	Refers to a wide of array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations, including: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, secular organizations, professional associations, and foundations. ³⁶
United Nations ³⁷ agencies, funds and programs	In general, the funds (not always) and programmes (not always) of the United Nations are established by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly and have a focused mandate. The UN specialized agencies are autonomous organizations working with the United Nations. All started collaborating with the UN through negotiated agreements. Some existed before the First World War. Some were associated with the League of Nations. Others were created almost simultaneously with the UN. <i>(description is continued on next page)</i>





Stakeholder	Description
United Nations agencies, funds and programs	<i>Continuation from previous page:</i> Others were created by the UN to meet emerging needs. Some of the United Nations agencies, funds and programs relevant to child-focused advocacy include: The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); The World Food Programme (WFP); The International Labor Organization (ILO); The International Organization for Migration (IOM); The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and The World Health Organization (WHO). ³⁸
Political institutions	Departments and offices in governments that create, enforce, and apply laws. They exist at different levels and include, for example, the parliaments, ministries, ombudsman’s office, etc.
Policymakers	Individuals responsible for or involved in the design and development of policies, particularly in politics. In government, they exist at different levels including local and national. Policies are developed by heads of state, advisors, ministers, and mayors, among others.
The media	The means or channels through which people access information, communication, and/or entertainment. Examples of media include newspapers and other printed materials, radio, television, as well as online and social media platforms.
Scholars	Specialists in a particular branch of study. A scholar may also be an academic, who works as a professor, teacher or researcher.



Stakeholder	Description
Families	Including parents, caregivers, guardians, and extended family responsible for children's rearing and safety.
Children and young people	Including children aged 18 or younger as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and youth as defined by the domestic laws of the different nations.
Community members	Individuals who live in the same area and often interact and collaborate with and/or support each other. Community members sometimes take on different roles within the community such as community leaders or become community elders.
Teachers	Professionals whose job it is to help students acquire knowledge and develop competencies and skills.
Business corporations	For-profit businesses that are privately owned and operate through transactions that are determined by company members.





Building and strengthening partnerships: who to partner with to influence change

In answering question 2 by identifying and joining forces with strategic partners and allies, GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations can harness the reach and resources of key stakeholders to maximize their collective influence.

Therefore, once the team has agreed upon who they want to influence to bring about the change, it is very important to think about who else is trying to address the same situation at the moment; to identify whether some other group is already trying to influence the same target; and if so, to assess the potential to join forces for a common advocacy goal. GNRC members and faith-inspired organizations could consider partnering with various stakeholders, ranging from civil society organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, to government institutions, and beyond.

Some of the efforts around the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children involve multi-stakeholder partnerships. These take the form of interfaith GNRC committees or GNRC members collaborating with a variety of coalitions, alliances, or institutions, but also with key stakeholders that may not be faith-based or faith-inspired but still share the goal of protecting children's rights and well-being.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration has the potential to amplify a common voice and message to protect children. It allows for reaching a wider audience; creates opportunities for exchange and learning across different areas of expertise and spiritual experiences; and encourages replication of successes, rather than duplication of effort. In advocacy, working in





partnership with others is what takes the message further, because the process of building trust, developing respectful relations, and acting in solidarity for a common goal is what creates the strong foundations needed to work collaboratively for long-term, sustainable change.

Prioritizing a multi-stakeholder approach to advocacy allows collaboration at multiple levels, including: technical support to plan and carry out actions; funding opportunities; platforms to engage with others around a common interest; networking to facilitate dialogue and exchange; or mobilizing public support for a common goal. Building and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships can lead to formal or informal collaboration, with one or multiple institutions, organizations, coalitions, networks, or alliances. However, formal partnerships can open an additional opportunity to engage at an institutional level that will take the collaboration beyond any individual's capacity.

Most of the GNRC members incorporate these and other forms of partnerships, including with different faith and spiritual communities, religious leaders, and faith-inspired organizations. Nonetheless, over the years they have also expanded these efforts to partner with other key stakeholders including government institutions, United Nations funds and agencies, civil society organizations, and media. Many reported increased impact for their interfaith efforts to end violence against children at both community and policy-making levels.

Collaboration between adults and children

Children are at the core of the GNRC work, and their active participation is one of the strengths of the network.³⁹ In several contexts, children are not only the intended beneficiaries but also act as key partners of the efforts at interfaith advocacy. Respect for the views of the child in regard to matters affecting his/her life is enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC, also referred to as the right of the child to be heard. Article 12 provides for children the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and that their views must be given “due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” The right to be heard is also closely related to the

Tip 3

Working with other stakeholders has an enormous potential to amplify your voice and convey your message further and faster. This could be in the form of partnerships with organizations, communities, or institutions, but also active participation in existing working groups, coalitions and platforms addressing child rights issues. See step 4 below on advocacy action and implementation for more ideas.



rights to freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14), freedom of association (Article 15) and information (Article 17). Article 12 alone, or in conjunction with these other rights, is often referred to as recognizing the participation rights of children.

Children's participation in Arigatou International's work is based on the premise that children have important insights into their own lives, and that their views should be granted respect by peers and adults interacting with them and influencing their development. It is about working both *for* and *with* them by creating opportunities for children to engage in decision-making processes and to claim their rights; consulting them on participation opportunities; and empowering them to take collaborative action with adults to positively transform their care and development environment. Related to the right to be heard is the concept of the evolving capacities of the child,⁴⁰ which recognizes the diverse childhood experiences and the role of caregivers in creating safe and respectful environments for children to share their views according to their level of maturity.

"GNRC Tanzania has always celebrated the World Day to raise awareness on the CRC and to advocate to end violence against children. We are proud to say that the Tanzania Network on Child Marriage, in which GNRC Tanzania participates, made the High Court to rule the review of the Child Act. We advocate for the articles to be reviewed so that children are not allowed to marry before 18 years old, and now it is finally being reviewed by the parliament."

—Joyce Mdachi, GNRC Coordinator, Tanzania

Arigatou International's approach to children's participation

Arigatou International's focus on children is at the center of all we do and how we do it. We work to ensure the creation of safe spaces and learning opportunities, free from any form of violence, where children can fully express themselves, participate, engage with people of both similar and different cultures and beliefs, and become actively engaged in our work and in their own communities.

Arigatou International has great faith in children and what they can do. Children and young people are deeply respected and valued partners in every Arigatou International initiative. We are strongly committed to listening to children with empathy and respect, and welcome their wisdom and recommendations, working side by side with them. We are committed to ensuring that every action taken in our work promotes children's dignity, rights, and opportunity to freely pursue their full human potential.



Nine Basic Requirements for Effecting and Ethical Participation of Children

Participation is:

- 1 transparent and informative
- 2 voluntary
- 3 respectful
- 4 relevant
- 5 child-friendly
- 6 inclusive
- 7 supported by training
- 8 safe and sensitive to risk; and
- 9 accountable.

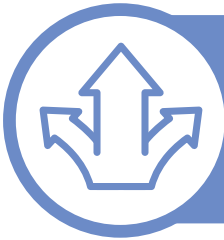
General Comment No. 12 of the CRC outlines **Nine Basic Requirements for Effecting and Ethical Participation of Children**⁴¹ to provide guidance on how children can be allowed to exercise their right to be heard in a meaningful and ethical way. Promoting collaborative participation by both adults and children may be challenging in some contexts due to cultural, religious, or socio-political norms. However, the meaningful participation of children in planning and implementing an interfaith approach to advocacy can help them to develop their relations with others and empower them by: increasing their self-confidence to speak up; enabling them to gain a better understanding of the world around them and the values and needs of diverse communities; developing their skills and spirituality; encouraging them (and adults) to learn from and support each other based on respectful and empathetic interactions; developing collective actions across gender, socio-economic, ethnic and religious divides; and increasing their protection by creating a safety net that they can rely on.





GNRC Panama promotes collaborative participation through consultation, planning and presentation of *Faith and Children's Rights* study

The development of *Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* involved consultations with children from seven countries including Panama. GNRC Panama supported the participation of children in the consultation by creating a safe space for them to reflect on their faith experiences and how their faith had helped them to enjoy their rights. As part of this process, GNRC Panama, in collaboration with children and young people, decided to organize a local launch of the study report, where children presented the study and their vision of the role faith communities have in protecting and promoting their rights.



4 Advocacy action planning and implementation

Careful advocacy planning can make a significant positive difference in the outcomes of advocacy actions. Good strategic planning leads to the most effective use of available resources and helps to minimize risks and maximize opportunities. This step is about planning and carrying out specific activities that will contribute to reaching the advocacy goal. It is the time for action to achieve the shared vision and goal: to influence sustainable and transformative change for the rights and well-being of children. As explained above, these actions may take place *with* others or *within* faith communities, but all are guided by the shared vision. This step forms the core of the third component of the interfaith approach to advocacy in this Guide; the time has come to go beyond dialogue to take collaborative action.

Advocacy planning and implementation are largely determined by the context and good timing. Advocacy messages, activities, and opportunities vary, depending on the local realities, capacities and needs. Careful attention needs to be paid to the local culture, risks, and expertise when planning and implementing advocacy (see the [companion toolkit](#) for tools to develop an interfaith action plan for advocacy).

Any plan begins with a goal. For advocacy, it is crucial to set **SMART** goals that contribute to effective impact, accountability, and learning:

Specific	What change do you want to achieve?
Measurable	How will you know the change happened? What specific results contribute to that?
Achievable	Is the change that you want to advocate for realistic and achievable?
Relevant	How would your advocacy goal contribute to a significant change for children?
Time-bound	By when do you want that change to be accomplished?

Identifying key messages

Advocacy messages are the requests and actions that an organization or a group require from specific stakeholders to transform an issue (the “asks”). As mentioned above, GNRC members have been focusing their messages around the prevention and elimination of violence against children by taking action to fulfill the 10 Panama Commitments on Ending Violence against Children.





Using a child rights-based approach in advocacy messages can open more opportunity for dialogue and commitment, since faith and spiritual communities and faith-inspired organizations have historically supported children's rights and well-being, and the CRC provides a framework that is in line with religious principles.⁴²

An advocacy message needs to be as concise and consistent as possible, and generally addresses:

- The analysis of the problem;
- The evidence on which the analysis is based;
- The importance of the change that is being sought;
- A proposed way to achieve the change; and
- Actions asked of a specific stakeholder to bring about the change for the rights and well-being of children.

It is widely known that violence against children has a harmful and long-term impact on children. When it comes to advocacy, there are two approaches to presenting evidence that can make a difference in the result: positive or negative evidence. In human rights advocacy in general, there is a tendency to convey advocacy messages that urge action based on the negative evidence that makes an issue relevant, such as the harmful impact of physical and mental abuse of children on their development. Although these challenges are all too real, the evidence on the impact of various positive coping skills has



“Advocacy is not only a political or economic matter but also a spiritual one. It is important to raise awareness about faith as a movement and that we, as GNRC, are one representation of that movement with a common goal of improving the situation of children in the world.”

— Father Abdo Raad, GNRC member, Lebanon (Annas Linnas Association)



also been established, such as resilience-building and empowerment, which help children cope better with the challenging and harmful issues they face. It has been substantiated that a positive source of resilience and empowerment for children — and adults too — is provided by the common and positive values of faith communities, including empathy, respect, responsibility and/or reconciliation.⁴³



Figure 4: Approaches to advocacy messages

Using both approaches in advocacy messages conveys a more powerful call to action. They address different angles of the issue but supplement each other by putting together the negative and the positive evidence to show not only that the problem exists, but that the extraordinary capacity of children to cope with the situation is worth further support from key stakeholders.





Example of advocacy message:

Analysis: Violence against children remains a serious concern for society. Its root causes include poverty and social exclusion, and many other deeply-seated political, cultural and familial factors.

Evidence (negative): According to UNICEF, close to 300 million (3 in 4) children aged 2 to 4 worldwide experience violent discipline by their caregivers on a regular basis; 250 million (around 6 in 10) are punished by physical means. Every 7 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent is murdered in an act of violence.⁴⁴

Evidence (positive): Children thrive and grow in trusting relationships with people who love and care for them. For the most part, this happens within families, where children (sometimes, not always) manage to develop resilience in levels that have transformed the violence that they have suffered into testimony to protect others from becoming victims.

Importance of the change: Tackling violence against children is about building a society committed to peace; breaking the historical cycle of oppression and unequal power relationships; and giving children the opportunity to flourish and develop their full potential in a world that protects their dignity and respects their rights.

Proposed solution: Families often need support to grow to become peaceful, safe sanctuaries. Working with families is key to protecting children in their primary care environment and promoting positive parenting skills that influence sustainable and lasting change and will carry over to future generations of parents.

Action asked (for example): Request that government policymakers support and fund training in positive parenting for families in order to support children's holistic well-being, and ensure that faith communities are involved in the delivery of these training programs.

Tip 4

Using an interfaith approach to developing advocacy messages makes them more powerful when they emphasize the importance of spirituality in a child's development and highlight the role of all faith communities in supporting the child's ecosystem. Advocacy messages should build upon what brings these communities together and their willingness to speak and act together for the benefit of children.



ACT

Advocacy actions

Another important aspect of an advocacy plan is the channel through which the advocacy message will be conveyed. Advocacy actions include a variety of options, including but not limited to interfaith prayer services, awareness raising and campaigning, policy development and lobbying, platform building and mobilization, capacity building, and research and evidence-based advocacy. Additionally, it can include a variety of tactics, running along a spectrum from cooperative to persuasive approaches. While there are, of course, more aggressive and confrontational tactics, Arigatou International recommends an approach based on more positive language, featuring dialogue, reflection and the effort to find shared solutions.

The platforms and opportunities may vary depending on several factors, including: political climate and timing; partnerships; political will; relevance of the issue; and engagement strategies. The experience of GNRC members shows that the more they collaborate in alliances with other stakeholders, the more they gain additional opportunities to mobilize and generate impact at both local and national levels.

Tip 5

Selecting **the right format to communicate your advocacy message** is key to impactful actions. It often depends on:

- the **audience(s)** you are interested in reaching (e.g., religious leaders, faith communities, parents/caregivers, children, policymakers, etc.);
- the **timing** (e.g., a political, cultural, or social moment); and
- the identification of **mobilization strategies** that are most relevant to the audience you aim to reach (e.g., children and young people tend to be particularly interested in creative campaigning strategies, whereas educators tend to be particularly interested in capacity-building workshops).



interfaith prayer services

Interfaith prayer⁴⁵ services can be an opportunity to strengthen engagement and mobilization of diverse faith communities and faith-inspired organizations. As described in Chapter 2, both prayer and action are at the core of how faith communities and faith-inspired organizations maintain hope and express commitment to children's rights and well-being. Interfaith prayer services can be a powerful opportunity to bring people together from across religious and spiritual traditions; to serve as a platform to respect and value multi-religious and spiritual beliefs and to pray or meditate for a common cause; to provide a visual and spiritual representation of interfaith dialogue for a shared vision of children; and to prioritize children's dignity, their right to flourish in peaceful, safe and caring environments, and recognize and support their precious role in society.



awareness raising & campaigning

Some of the most powerful advocacy actions include campaigning and awareness-raising. A campaign is the process of creating and mobilizing public pressure for the desired changes in policy, practice or behavior through a combination of lobbying, networking, media attention and involvement of people.⁴⁶ The idea of a campaign is that all these elements are influenced in coordination and simultaneously, reinforcing each other to create a purposeful impact on the target audience. The main advantages of campaigning are that it enables the simultaneous use of different actions (e.g., panel discussions, mass communication events, statements and press releases); engagement with multiple stakeholders; and inter-generational participation (e.g. interfaith prayer services with participation by both adults and children). Other ways to raise awareness include public processions, symbolic actions (e.g., street dramas, photo/art exhibitions, wearing wristbands), and petitions.

“We began advocating with religious leaders and children to address the need for a comprehensive child protection law, and we made important progress in the past year. There were parliamentary sessions in which both religious leaders and children had the opportunity to share about the relevance of this law. It was a very important step, but the advocacy work continues.”

— Isis Navarro, GNRC Coordinator, Panama
(Comité Ecuménico de Panamá)

GNRC Bosnia and Herzegovina builds interfaith collaboration through interfaith dialogue and interfaith prayer services

GNRC Bosnia and Herzegovina has celebrated the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children since 2009 by involving parents and children from different schools. The first activities were organized with 50 students and with only one religious leader attending. Over the years, the World Day and interfaith prayer services served as a platform to start involving different religious leaders from the Visoko district, including Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox leaders. They also started cooperating with public institutions including the center for mental health, public schools, and the police. Today, the World Day activities take place during the whole month of November and reach over 500 students.



Faith in Action for Children: Arigatou International's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Arigatou International launched an online global campaign titled **Faith In Action for Children** in March 2020. The campaign aims to mobilize and support religious leaders and communities, parents, caregivers and educators to protect and empower children and strengthen their resilience, to ensure their physical, socio-emotional and spiritual well-being. An important part of the campaign is to provide opportunities for children and young people to express their needs, feelings, views and hopes. It also aims to provide resources for religious leaders, to strengthen the spaces for them to become connected with one another, critically reflect about the current situation and their roles, and positively contribute to their communities while practicing social distancing and adhering to hygiene measures to protect their own health as well as the health of others.

This online space has also been an invaluable platform for keeping GNRC members connected and informed. Several virtual meetings, both regional and global, have been held with GNRC members to learn more about COVID-19 and its

effects on children and to allow them to share their local experiences with each other. The meetings have benefited from children's own contributions about the pandemic and how it has affected them. Several GNRC networks have worked jointly with other partners at the grassroots level to create awareness and to support affected communities, especially the vulnerable, with basic necessities such as personal protective equipment, food and medicine. Additionally, various kinds of information, education and communication materials have been developed, including videos by faith leaders and children, to support the campaign.

The **Faith in Action for Children** campaign builds on the commitments made during the GNRC 5th Forum held in Panama in May 2017, which, under the banner of ending all violence against children, focused on the following themes: "Protecting Children from Violent Extremism, Gang Violence and Organized Crime," "Nurturing Spirituality and Ending Violence in Child Upbringing," and "Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children."



GNRC member from Serbia campaigns and raise awareness through creative expression activities

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children has been celebrated in Serbia for several years in collaboration with Sombor Educational Center. Workshops, plays and other activities are offered every year for children and young people, parents, and community members. In 2017, the GNRC member started a bigger campaign to promote the development of a child protection policy and to increase the local budget for activities related to the prevention of violence against children. A petition was started and signatures collected, among other actions, with the participation of both Muslim and Orthodox Christian individuals, some of them refugees.





Capacity building

Many GNRC members also use capacity building as an advocacy and awareness-raising mechanism. This can be in the form of one-off awareness-raising workshops with different groups of children and adults, or a series of workshops that benefit a certain group of people. In some contexts, these workshops are designed using the *Learning to Live Together*⁴⁷ program and its Ethics Education Framework to address issues related to violence against children. Capacity building brings enormous benefits to advocacy goals related to behavior change and change of systems, as it encourages reflection, exchange, learning, and contextual approaches to challenges and opportunities to promote change. In addition, participating in capacity-building workshops sometimes provides opportunities to meet like-minded people from other communities and to network with organizations who may wish to collaborate in future.



"The cyber safety program has reached 2,000 children from four districts in Sri Lanka. The program consists of one-off capacity building workshops to empower children on the positive and safe use of the internet. The program raises awareness on the risks they could find online and how to protect themselves and others through the ethical and responsible use of social media."

— Lakshman Sashikala, GNRC



policy development & lobbying



Actions at this level include participation in working groups, platforms, or coalitions addressing either a policy gap (e.g., lack of a national child protection policy) or a policy that is detrimental to children's dignity and rights (e.g., a policy that aims to lower the minimum age for children to enter the juvenile justice system). Participating in policy development processes requires lobbying key policymakers at local or national levels that have the power to influence the outcome of the process (e.g., parliamentarians).

However, actions to influence policy development can also be taken through United Nations advocacy. All States Parties to the CRC have obligations to adapt their legal and judicial systems to comply with the treaty. Partnering with UN agencies or funds and using the UN mechanisms can be very influential actions for interfaith advocacy.

GNRC Tanzania advocates for legislative change to protect children against child marriage

GNRC Tanzania is an active member of other networks of civil society organizations including the Tanzania Child Marriage Network (TCMN). Together with Muslim, Christian, Bahá'í, and Hindu communities, they advocate for articles to be reviewed so that children are not allowed to marry before 18 years old. After months of advocacy efforts, the TCMN achieved a key milestone: the High Court ruled that the child act should be reviewed. GNRC Tanzania has always celebrated the World Day as an opportunity to raise awareness on the CRC and to advocate for the elimination of violence against children.



Tip 6

Success in addressing UN agencies or funds as partners depends on several factors including:

- the **emphasis and motivation** of the present leadership;
- **reaching out to the most relevant organizational area/unit** for the advocacy goal (e.g., for UNICEF, it could be relevant to address divisions such as child protection, education or early childhood development, depending on the level of change you want to promote through your advocacy actions);
- introducing a **results-oriented and evidence-based collaboration proposal**; and
- addressing common **advocacy goals** that respond to the rights and well-being of children (see the [companion toolkit](#) for sample letters to address stakeholders).

UN advocacy

There are two main approaches to engaging with UN agencies in interfaith advocacy for children: addressing individual UN agencies or UN funds as partners for advocacy actions, or using the UN mechanisms that allow for the participation of civil society to influence UN processes for monitoring CRC implementation.

There are three UN Human Rights Mechanisms that may be relevant platforms for advocacy: Universal Periodic Review, the Treaty Body Reporting Cycle, and the Special Procedures (see Annex II for a detailed description). Experience has shown that the most effective way to participate in these platforms is in coalition with other civil society organizations at the appropriate local, national, regional or international level.



platform building & mobilization

A lot has been said about the added value of collaborative work in advocacy. However, the process of developing these collaborations can take multiple forms including alliances, coalitions, partnerships, or networks. All of these platforms use collaborative methods to achieve specific goals. However, it is important to consider the subtle differences between them before engaging in or creating such platforms.

GNRC Argentina makes use of UN human rights mechanisms to monitor children's rights in Argentina

In coalition with other civil society organizations, GNRC Argentina has been actively engaged in advocacy actions to influence the recommendations of the CRC Committee to the Argentinian State. They contributed to the development of the alternative report to the CRC Committee. Additionally, they worked to disseminate the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee to the Argentinian State. As part of the process, GNRC Argentina carried out actions at the community level to empower children and youth to speak up for and claim their rights, and to encourage decision-makers to implement the most recent CRC Committee recommendations.

In October 2018, GNRC Argentina also organized an advocacy event in the national Senate with the participation of Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Nobel Peace Prize winner), other well-known personalities, and representatives of various faith-based institutions and civil society organizations. More than 80 young people from different parts of Argentina participated in the event. The main objective was to recall the obligation of the legislators to monitor the implementation of the recommendations issued by the CRC Committee. On this occasion, the children expressed their concerns and requested immediate actions to protect them.



Type of alliance	Key features
Alliance	Long-term agreement with partners to work toward common ideals/goals. Actions and strategies are jointly developed by members.
Coalition	Temporary agreement with a formalized structure between diverse stakeholders to work on a single issue, event, or campaign.
Network	A rather flexible structure that encourages dialogue and information exchange among diverse stakeholders, usually with similar thematic priorities and work.
Partnership	An agreement under which two or more organizations work collaboratively on a mutual interest that advances their mission and scope.



Platforms for advocacy

Participation in platforms for advocacy — whether in the form of alliances, coalitions, networks or working groups — can help to take advocacy messages further and deeper. The following tables include some key interfaith and multi-stakeholder platforms at global, regional and national levels that may offer opportunities to influence practice and decision-making processes around the protection of children’s rights and well-being.



Interfaith platforms

Platform	Scope	Description
Alliance for the Protection of Children	Regional	<p>The Alliance for the Protection of Children is an initiative of more than 50 faith-based organizations and communities created in 2017 within the framework of the 5th Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, to prevent and address the impact of gangs and organized crime on children and youth in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico. The Alliance is made up of a Regional Steering Committee and 4 National Committees, one in each country of the sub-region.</p> <p>For more information on the Alliance for the Protection of Children, visit: https://www.alianzappn.org/</p>
The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC)	Global	<p>The GNRC is the leading global interfaith network devoted to working for child rights and other children's issues. Its membership and partners include a diverse group of religious leaders, faith-based organizations serving children, development workers, and UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO. The GNRC was founded in May 2000 and it conducts region-wide and local programs to improve children's lives in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and South Asia.</p> <p>For more information on the GNRC visit: Arigatou International's website.</p>
International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)	Global	<p>PaRD brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs), to engage the social capital and capacities vested in diverse faith communities for sustainable development and humanitarian assistance in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p> <p>For more information visit: PaRD's website.</p>



Interfaith platforms (continued)

Platform	Scope	Description
Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities	Global	<p>The Interfaith Alliance aims to mobilize faith leaders from across the world, in partnership with other stakeholders such as governments, international and local NGOs, to ensure the protection of the dignity of children in the digital world. Its initiatives aim to increase awareness of the role that faith leaders can play in protecting children in their communities. The initiatives include hosting global forums, organizing regional workshops and publishing knowledge resources.</p> <p>For further information on the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, visit: https://iafsc.org/</p>
Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities (JLI)	Global	<p>JLI serves as an open-access knowledge-sharing platform on faith groups' activities, contributions and challenges in achieving humanitarian and development goals through its Knowledge Partnerships and Learning Hubs. Arigatou International co-chairs the JLI Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) Learning Hub. The EVAC Hub has an important role to play in bringing together practitioners, policy actors and researchers in the faith realm to counter violence against children.</p> <p>For more information on the JLI, visit: https://jliflc.com/</p>
The Children on the Move Coalition	Global	<p>The Children on the Move Coalition is a group of faith-inspired organizations committed to working together to end violence against children on the move. For more than two years, a group of 14 faith-based organizations has worked together to end violence against children on the move, including refugee, immigrant and internally displaced children.</p> <p>For more information on The Children on the Move Coalition, visit: World Vision's website.</p>



Other Platforms

Platform	Scope	Description
Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children	Global and national	<p>The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was launched in July 2016 by the UN Secretary-General. Today, the End Violence Partnership is the only global entity focused solely on Sustainable Development Goal 16.2: ending all forms of violence against children. It links practitioners to resources, governments to evidence, and donors to investment-ready solutions, all with a focus on three main priorities: including country engagement, keeping children safe to learn, and protecting them from online risks. End Violence also manages the affiliated End Violence Fund, which has invested over \$42.6 million in effective, evidence-based programs over the last three years. Country engagement happens through what is called “pathfinder countries” — nations that have committed to changing laws, policies and societal norms around violence. In most of the pathfinder countries, national multi-stakeholder working groups or civil society coalitions have been set up to follow up on and support the commitment made by the State. This is an excellent advocacy opportunity for GNRC committees and members.</p> <p>More information on pathfinder countries, members and grants is available at the Progress Map.</p>
SDG monitoring mechanisms	Global (HLPF) and national (VNRs)	<p>The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development, and it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven” (paragraph 79). These national reviews are called Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the HLPF. As stipulated by the 2030 Agenda, regular reviews by the HLPF are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and should provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>For more information on the HLPF, visit: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf For more information on the VNRs, visit the Voluntary National Reviews Database from the UN.</p>



Other Platforms (continued)

Platform	Scope	Description
SDG monitoring mechanisms	Regional SDG monitoring mechanisms	<p>All regions have also established regional mechanisms to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs and associated targets. These mechanisms are also State-led and open to the participation of all countries in the region. They usually involve States, the private sector and civil society, as well as development banks, the UN agencies and other regional integration bodies. These mechanisms provide excellent opportunities for civil society to monitor SDG implementation and advocate for accountability of States.</p> <p>Latin America and the Caribbean: Forum of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2019/en</p> <p>Asia Pacific: Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) https://www.unescap.org/apfsd/7/</p> <p>Africa: Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development https://www.uneca.org/arfsd2020/pages/about-forum</p> <p>Europe and Central Asia: UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development</p>
Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)	Regional and national	<p>GCAP is a network of over 11,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) organized in 58 National Coalitions and in constituency groups of women, youth and socially-excluded people, among others. GCAP supports people in their struggles for justice and brings individuals and organizations together to challenge the institutions and processes that perpetuate poverty and inequalities.</p> <p>For more information on the GCAP, visit: https://gcap.global/</p>
Child Rights Connect	Global	<p>Child Rights Connect is an independent, non-profit network made up of more than 80 national, regional, and international organizations. Its aim is to ensure that all children can fully enjoy their rights, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Working Groups are integral parts of the network of Child Rights Connect. The specific issues of Working Groups reflect the main priorities of the network, complementing the overall strategic objectives, as defined in the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>For more information on Child Rights Connect and its working groups, visit: https://www.childrightsconnect.org/</p>



Other Platforms (continued)

Platform	Scope	Description
The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)	Global	ISPCAN brings together the range of professionals that work toward the prevention and treatment of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. For more information on ISPCAN, visit: https://www.ispcan.org
Regional civil society alliances	Africa	African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN): http://www.anppcan.org/
	Asia	Child Rights Coalition Asia: https://www.crcasia.org/
	Latin America & the Caribbean	Redlamyc: http://redlamyc.org/v1/
	Europe	Eurochild: https://www.eurochild.org
	Middle East	Manara Network: http://www.manaracrc.net/index.php
National alliances and coalitions for CRC monitoring	National & sub-national	These are national alliances with a particular focus on monitoring the implementation of the CRC at the national level. As alliances, they usually have been established for the long-term and involve multiple child-focused groups, initiatives and organizations.



GNRC Peru working with the National Coalition to End Violence Against Children

Peru has been a pathfinding country in the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children since 2018 and has been committing to increase public investment to end violence against children. In June 2017, a National Coalition to End Violence against Children was set up with organizations that work on the promotion and protection of the rights of children and that want to work together to advocate for the protection for children from all forms of violence, strengthen capacities of the stakeholders that are part of the national child protection system, promote the seven INSPIRE strategies to end violence against children, and promote the participation and empowerment of children. See: <https://www.facebook.com/GIFinViolenciaContraNNAPeru/>

GNRC Peru has been a member of this Coalition since April 2018 and participates in the meetings of the Coalition, voicing the perspectives of the faith communities and faith-inspired organizations of the country and contributing to the advocacy activities carried out by the group.



Online advocacy and mobilization

Online presence and social media have gained increasing importance over the last decades. Concepts such as “online community” have become one of the many ways of building social fabric. It did not take long for technology to allow people to communicate faster, easier, from anywhere, and with virtually anyone.

The digital world has given a new dimension to mobilization, one that maintains the engagement of individuals and groups but through platforms and channels that do not involve in-person gatherings or interactions. Online mobilization has the potential to amplify advocacy messages in real-time by reaching like-minded individuals and groups, who, once convinced of the value of the action or message you would like to promote, can spread them via their networks to create a ripple effect. Communicating effectively online has become even more important in the context of the lock-downs and quarantines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online mobilization for advocacy requires strategic thinking and planning about what information is relevant to communicate, to which audiences, and via which platforms and channels. Which of these to use depends on the advocacy goal, messages and audience. It is important to bear in mind that not all platforms reach the same audience; demographic information on the main social media

platforms can be a useful starting point to assess the best channel for online mobilization. Faith communities and faith-based organizations have a broad outreach that includes children, young people and adults. Many faith communities actively use traditional communication channels as well as social media to remain connected.





Main communication channels that could be considered for advocacy:

Platform or Channel	Description
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It could be your organization's main source of information for stakeholders and also a channel for fundraising.• Websites can be a good way to convey information about your cause.
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A social media platform that allows users to share their own content with friends or the public.• One of its tools allows live streaming, which can be useful for real-time capacity building and campaigning.• It is useful for building loyalty and community around your cause.
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A micro-blogging tool which can work very well as a storytelling tool.• The main purpose of Twitter is to generate conversation about current events.• It is useful for enhancing your public relations and drawing attention to your cause.
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A platform for sharing videos, including live-streams, that supports creativity.• It is useful for raising awareness.• 80% of Internet traffic is video.• Examples include vlogging, testimonial videos, podcasts, and interviews.
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tools can be used for sending emails or newsletters to a massive number of users.• This will save you time and also let you design more creative messages.• Email marketing is the best option for sending relevant detailed information, official communications and extensive documents• Free tools include Mailchimp, Sendinblue, and MailerLite.
Local media (including faith-based radio or TV stations.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A good option for reaching populations who don't use social media or have no internet access.



research & evidence building

Evidence makes a significant difference when doing advocacy. This can be obtained by finding the right qualitative and quantitative resources to support the advocacy. The evidence must be timely — use the latest figures available, if possible, on child abuse or other data, for example. Evidence strengthens the advocacy message. Organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and local institutions will have important, useful data.

As mentioned above, evidence-based messages are more powerful and result-oriented than statements that are not supported by information that makes the issue relevant. Faith communities and faith-inspired organizations in general make outstanding grassroots contributions to children's well-being and development. However, documentation of these efforts is not always prioritized in their program implementation. Efforts to increase the documentation and recording of the impact of faith-based programming (e.g., through the use of monitoring tools such as pre- and post- tests or evaluations, observation forms, or most significant change stories) can greatly inform advocacy efforts at local, regional and global levels.

Importantly, the involvement of faith communities and faith-inspired organizations in research is an advocacy action with enormous potential to bring faith perspectives into analysis and decision-making processes to address child rights issues, but most importantly, to promote interfaith dialogue and collaboration for children's rights and well-being.

Tip 7

- **Planning and responsible use of online platforms** are the key to successful online mobilization.
- **Child-safeguarding online is a priority** when encouraging online mobilization. Please follow Arigatou International's [Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct](#) for any engagement of children in online activity.
- **Prioritizing audiovisual content** can be an inclusive communication tool and convey a larger amount of information thanks to the combination of visuals, audio and text overlays.
- **Online mobilization implies a responsibility to be constant, informative, reliable, and committed.** It is important to build a sense of belonging among the people, faith communities and organizations interested to join mobilization efforts by underlying the value of coming together to act collaboratively for the rights and well-being of children.



Arigatou International's involvement in building the evidence base on the impact of faith-inspired action

- Since 2012, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) has been serving as an open-access knowledge-sharing platform for faith groups' activities, contributions and challenges in achieving humanitarian and development goals through its Knowledge Partnerships and Learning Hubs. Arigatou International co-chairs the JLI Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) Learning Hub. The EVAC Hub has an important role to play in bringing together practitioners, policy actors and researchers in the faith realm to counter violence against children. The Hub allows members to contribute to research; collect and share evidence; facilitate learning and understanding; and disseminate insights gained from research and good practice examples. All of this is intended to highlight the need to have greater and meaningful faith engagement for lasting transformative change in the prevention and ending of violence against children.
- As part of Child Rights Connect, Arigatou co-convenes the working group on Children and Violence, and is a member of the working group on Children in Armed Conflict. The Working Group on Children and Violence aims to promote action that will prompt violence prevention strategies and protect children who are vulnerable. Currently, the Working Group is developing a mapping and analysis of how violence against children is being addressed by UN Human Rights Mechanisms, namely the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Universal Periodic Review and the Human Rights Council Resolutions.





5 Monitoring, learning, and adapting

Advocacy efforts evolve with changing contexts, messages, and actions. It is important to continuously follow-up on the progress of the advocacy efforts as the plan is being implemented; doing so creates opportunities to learn, adapt, and increase success (see the [companion toolkit](#) for further guidance on how to monitor, learn, and adapt).



Some questions to support ongoing reflection and evaluation include:

- *Is the interfaith advocacy action going as planned? (e.g., logistics, activity content, audience)*
- *What changes have happened since the beginning of the implementation? (e.g., on the context, people involved, children)*
- *What have been the unintended results of our advocacy action? (If any)*
- *What worked well and what could be improved?*
- *Are we achieving the advocacy purpose? (e.g., are our efforts still relevant to the context, the issue, and the audience?)*
- *How has the target group changed since the beginning of the advocacy action?*



Chapter 3 Footnotes

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Annexes

I. Summary of the CRC

*A summary of the rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (*Adapted from: [UNICEF United Kingdom](#))*

ARTICLE 1 *(Definition of the child)*

The Convention defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18.

ARTICLE 2 *(Non-discrimination)*

The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

ARTICLE 3 *(Best interests of the child)*

The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers.

ARTICLE 4 *(Protection of rights)*

Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. When countries ratify the Convention, they agree to review their laws relating to children. This involves assessing their social services, legal, health and educational systems, as well as levels of funding for these services. Governments are then obliged to take all necessary steps to ensure that the minimum standards set by the Convention in these areas are being met. They must help families protect children's rights and create an environment where they can grow and reach their potential. In some instances, this may involve changing existing laws or creating new ones. Such legislative changes are not imposed, but come about through the same process by which any law is created or reformed within a country. Article 41 of the Convention points out that when a country already has higher legal standards than those seen in the Convention, the higher standards always prevail.



ARTICLE 5 *(Parental guidance)*

Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly. Helping children to understand their rights does not mean pushing them to make choices with consequences that they are too young to handle. Article 5 encourages parents to deal with rights issues “in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.” The Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their parents and give more authority to governments. It does place on governments the responsibility to protect and assist families in fulfilling their essential role as nurturers of children.

ARTICLE 6 *(Survival and development)*

Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

ARTICLE 7 *(Registration, name, nationality, care)*

All children have the right to a legally registered name, officially recognized by the government. Children have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country). Children also have the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.

ARTICLE 8 *(Preservation of identity)*

Children have the right to an identity – an official record of who they are. Governments should respect children’s right to a name, a nationality and family ties.

ARTICLE 9 *(Separation from parents)*

Children have the right to live with their parent(s), unless it is bad for them. Children whose parents do not live together have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child.

ARTICLE 10 *(Family reunification)*

Families whose members live in different countries should be allowed to move between those countries so that parents and children can stay in contact, or get back together as a family.

ARTICLE 11 *(Kidnapping)*

Governments should take steps to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally. This article is particularly concerned with parental abductions. The Convention’s Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography has a provision that concerns abduction for financial gain.

ARTICLE 12 *(Respect for the views of the child)*

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. This does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making – not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with parents’ right and responsibility to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that



the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

ARTICLE 13 *(Freedom of expression)*

Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others. In exercising the right to freedom of expression, children have the responsibility to also respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others. The freedom of expression includes the right to share information in any way they choose, including by talking, drawing or writing.

ARTICLE 14 *(Freedom of thought, conscience and religion)*

Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects the rights and duties of parents in providing religious and moral guidance to their children. Religious groups around the world have expressed support for the Convention, which indicates that it in no way prevents parents from bringing their children up within a religious tradition. At the same time, the Convention recognizes that as children mature and are able to form their own views, some may question certain religious practices or cultural traditions. The Convention supports children's right to

examine their beliefs, but it also states that their right to express their beliefs implies respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 15 *(Freedom of association)*

Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations, as long as it does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. In exercising their rights, children have the responsibility to respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others.

ARTICLE 16 *(Right to privacy)*

Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

ARTICLE 17 *(Access to information; mass media)*

Children have the right to get information that is important to their health and well-being. Governments should encourage mass media—radio, television, newspapers and Internet content sources—to provide information that children can understand and to not promote materials that could harm children. Mass media should particularly be encouraged to supply information in languages that minority and indigenous children can understand. Children should also have access to children's books.



ARTICLE 18 *(Parental responsibilities; state assistance)*

Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments must respect the responsibility of parents for providing appropriate guidance to their children – the Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their parents and give more authority to governments. It places a responsibility on governments to provide support services to parents, especially if both parents work outside the home.

ARTICLE 19 *(Protection from all forms of violence)*

Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them. In terms of discipline, the Convention does not specify what forms of punishment parents should use. However any form of discipline involving violence is unacceptable. There are ways to discipline children that are effective in helping children learn about family and social expectations for their behaviour – ones that are non-violent, are appropriate to the child's level of development and take the best interests of the child into consideration. In most countries, laws already define what sorts of punishments are considered excessive or abusive. It is up to each government to review these laws in light of the Convention.

ARTICLE 20 *(Children deprived of family environment)*

Children who cannot be looked after by their own family have a right to special care and must be looked after properly, by people who respect their ethnic group, religion, culture and language.

ARTICLE 21 *(Adoption)*

Children have the right to care and protection if they are adopted or in foster care. The first concern must be what is best for them. The same rules should apply whether they are adopted in the country where they were born, or if they are taken to live in another country.

ARTICLE 22 *(Refugee children)*

Children have the right to special protection and help if they are refugees (if they have been forced to leave their home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.

ARTICLE 23 *(Children with disabilities)*

Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support, as well as all the rights in the Convention, so that they can live full and independent lives.



ARTICLE 24 *(Health and health services)*

Children have the right to good quality health care—the best health care possible—to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

ARTICLE 25 *(Review of treatment in care)*

Children who are looked after by their local authorities, rather than their parents, have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate. Their care and treatment should always be based on “the best interests of the child.” (see Guiding Principles, Article 3)

ARTICLE 26 *(Social security)*

Children—either through their guardians or directly—have the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need.

ARTICLE 27 *(Adequate standard of living)*

Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing.

ARTICLE 28 *(Right to education)*

All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children’s dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child’s human dignity. Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

ARTICLE 29 *(Goals of education)*

Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people. Children have a particular responsibility to respect the rights of their parents, and education should aim to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents. The Convention does not address such issues as school uniforms, dress codes, the singing of the national anthem or prayer in schools. It is up to governments and school officials in each country to determine whether, in the context of their society and existing laws, such matters infringe upon other rights protected by the Convention.



ARTICLE 30 *(Children of minorities/indigenous groups)*

Minority or indigenous children have the right to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion. The right to practice one's own culture, language and religion applies to everyone; the Convention here highlights this right in instances where the practices are not shared by the majority of people in the country.

ARTICLE 31 *(Leisure, play and culture)*

Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.

ARTICLE 32 *(Child labour)*

The government should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or their education. While the Convention protects children from harmful and exploitative work, there is nothing in it that prohibits parents from expecting their children to help out at home in ways that are safe and appropriate to their age. If children help out in a family farm or business, the tasks they do should be safe and suited to their level of development and comply with national labour laws. Children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play.

ARTICLE 33 *(Drug abuse)*

Governments should use all means possible to protect children from the use of harmful drugs and from being used in the drug trade.

ARTICLE 34 *(Sexual exploitation)*

Governments should protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. This provision in the Convention is augmented by the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

ARTICLE 35 *(Abduction, sale and trafficking)*

The government should take all measures possible to make sure that children are not abducted, sold or trafficked. This provision in the Convention is augmented by the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

ARTICLE 36 *(Other forms of exploitation)*

Children should be protected from any activity that takes advantage of them or could harm their welfare and development.

ARTICLE 37 *(Detention and punishment)*

No one is allowed to punish children in a cruel or harmful way. Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. They should not be put in prison with adults, should be able to keep in contact with their families, and should not be sentenced to death or life imprisonment without possibility of release.



ARTICLE 38 *(War and armed conflicts)*

Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. Children under 15 should not be forced or recruited to take part in a war or join the armed forces. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict further develops this right, raising the age for direct participation in armed conflict to 18 and establishing a ban on compulsory recruitment for children under 18.

ARTICLE 39 *(Rehabilitation of child victims)*

Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

ARTICLE 40 *(Juvenile justice)*

Children who are accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment in a justice system that respects their rights. Governments are required to set a minimum age below which children cannot be held criminally responsible and to provide minimum guarantees for the fairness and quick resolution of judicial or alternative proceedings.

ARTICLE 41 *(Respect for superior national standards)*

If the laws of a country provide better protection of children's rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.

ARTICLE 42 *(Knowledge of rights)*

Governments should make the Convention known to adults and children. Adults should help children learn about their rights, too. (See also article 4.)

ARTICLES 43-54 *(Implementation measures)*

These articles discuss how governments and international organizations like UNICEF should work to ensure children are protected in their rights.



Opportunities to engage in the UPR process include:

- Participate in consultations with the government of the country under review as it prepares its national report;
- Lobby the government to accept recommendations;
- Release a written statement;
- Engage in consultation coordinated by the government to participate in the implementation of recommendations; and
- Monitor the implementation of recommendations through participation in child-focused working groups, alliances, or coalitions addressing child-rights issues.

II. UN Human Rights Mechanisms

Universal Periodic Review:

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a human rights process under the auspices of the Human Rights Council that reviews the human rights records of each of the 193 UN Member States once every four years. The UPR provides the opportunity for each government to declare what actions it has taken to improve the human rights situation in its country and to fulfill its human rights obligations.⁴⁸

Treaty body reporting cycle:

When a country ratifies a treaty (e.g., the Convention on the Rights of the Child), it assumes a legal obligation to implement the rights recognized in that treaty. In addition to its obligation to implement the substantive provisions of the treaty, each such State Party is also under an obligation to submit periodic reports to the relevant treaty body (which, for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the Committee on the Rights of the Child) on how the rights are being implemented in the country.



Opportunities to engage in the CRC reporting cycle⁵⁰ include:

- *Participate in consultations with your State Party as it prepares its report;*
- *Research, write, and submit a shadow report on child rights issues in the State Party (explore and ensure collaboration with other CSOs/FBOs to submit one joint report);*
- *Conduct awareness-raising activities about the report being developed;*
- *Lobby for legislation and other reforms to implement the treaty body's recommendations, and engage in consultation with your government to participate in the implementation of recommendations; and*
- *Submit an interim shadow report assessing implementation of priority recommendations (explore and ensure collaboration with other CSOs/FBOs to submit one joint report).*

In addition to States Parties' reports, the treaty bodies may receive information on a country's human rights situation from other sources, including national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, and professional groups and academic institutions.

In light of all the information available, the relevant treaty body examines the report in the presence of a State Party's delegation. Based on this constructive dialogue, the Committee publishes its concerns and recommendations, referred to as "concluding observations." The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that a State Party must submit an initial report to the Committee two years after it ratifies the CRC and it enters into force in the respective State, and then every five years thereafter. The submission date for subsequent periodic reports is set out in the last paragraph of the Concluding Observations.⁴⁹



Special Procedures:

The United Nations has “Special Procedures” to address specific country situations and broad human rights themes. Special Procedures are made up of experts investigating thematic or country-specific international human rights issues. Special Procedures usually have the power to examine, monitor, and publicly report on human rights situations in specific locations (known as country mandates), or on major human rights issues worldwide (known as thematic mandates).

Special Procedures mandate-holders are either an independent expert serving in an individual capacity (called a “Special Rapporteur,” “Special Representative of the Secretary-General,” or “Independent Expert”), or a working group usually composed of five members representing different geographic regions. They promote human rights by developing human rights standards, engaging in advocacy, conducting awareness-raising, giving technical advice to States and other international bodies, and making public statements in the form of annual and specific thematic reports.⁵¹

Relevant Special Procedures dealing with child rights issues include the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children; and the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

Opportunities to engage with these officials include:

- Prepare and present written information when the Special Representative/Rapporteur is studying a particular issue or conducting a country visit;
- Meet in person with the Special Representative/Rapporteur during a country-visit to provide first-hand information about human rights issues;
- Request an examination of a particular human rights issue or request a country visit to investigate an issue of concern;
- Submit a communication—either an “urgent appeal” or a non-urgent allegation letter — to the Special Representative/Rapporteur about an alleged human rights violation.



Annex II Footnotes



48. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, *Universal Periodic Review*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/upr/pages/basicfacts.aspx>

49. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, *Monitoring the core international human rights treaties*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/WhatTBDo.aspx>

50. See: Child Rights Connect. *The Reporting Cycle of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: A guide for NGOs and NHRIs*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/GuideNgoSubmission_en.pdf






51. Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, *Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx>



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“The place where prayer and action meet is the heart. It is in the human heart that the inward, contemplative dimension of prayer and meditation, and the outward, volitional dimension of action meet and can become one inspired whole.”

— Rev. Keishi Miyamoto
President, Arigatou International

