

A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence Against Children August 2006

As representatives of various religious communities gathered at the Religions for Peace VII World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, we are committed to confront the reality of violence that affects children in our societies. We offer our support to mobilizing the international community through the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children to address these critical issues, and we are ready to work in partnership with governments, UN agencies, and other civil society actors to implement the recommendations of this study.

We find strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child's development. Our religions share principles of compassion, justice, love and solidarity that are great strengths in dealing with the difficult presence of violence in human society.

Our faith traditions take a holistic view of a child's life, and thus seek to uphold all the rights of the child in the context of its family, community, and the broader social, economic and political environment. All children hold these rights equally and we must ensure that boys and girls have equal opportunities to enjoy these rights, particularly education, protection, health, social development and participation. Our religious communities are blessed to be multi-generational, and we must use this to support the active participation of children in their own development and to address issues of violence.

We must acknowledge that our religious communities have not fully upheld their obligations to protect our children from violence. Through omission, denial and silence, we have at times tolerated, perpetuated and ignored the reality of violence against children in homes, families, institutions and communities, and not actively confronted the suffering that this violence causes. Even as we have not fully lived up to our responsibilities in this regard, we believe that religious communities must be part of the solution to eradicating violence against children, and we commit ourselves to take leadership in our religious communities and the broader society.

None of us can address this problem alone. It requires partnerships, solidarity, and building alliances. Even as our religions have much to offer, we also are open to learning more about the development and well being of children from other sectors, so that we can each maximize our strengths. We are strongly committed to fostering effective mechanisms for inter-religious cooperation to more effectively combat violence against children.

Based on these principles and guided by the power of the Divine as it is understood in each of our traditions, we make the following recommendations and commitments, speaking to our religious communities, governments, the United Nations, civil society and to all throughout the world who have held a child in love-- with tears for its pain, with joy for its life:

1. We will create greater awareness in our communities about the impact of all forms of violence against children, and work actively to change attitudes and practices that perpetuate violence in homes, families, institutions and communities, including corporal punishment, emotional and sexual violence.

2. We will promote the child as a person with rights and dignity, using our religious texts to provide good examples that can help adults to stop using violence in dealing with children.

3. We have an important obligation to teach and train our children, which involves discipline and helping children understand their responsibilities. We will educate and train parents, teachers, religious leaders and others who work with children to find non-violent forms of discipline and education that will ensure their proper upbringing and protect them from violent actions.

4. We will develop curriculum to use in theological training and in parental education to raise awareness about child rights and ways to eliminate the use of violence.

5. We are committed to inter-religious cooperation to address violence and will make use of the synergies among our religious communities to promote methodologies, experiences and practices in preventing violence against children.

6. We call upon our governments to adopt legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, to ensure the full rights of children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional agreements. We urge them to establish appropriate mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and to ensure that religious communities participate formally in these mechanisms. Our religious communities are ready to serve as monitors of implementation, making use of national and international bodies to maintain accountability.

7. We encourage religious communities and other public actors to use special days, such as the International Day of the Child, to bring public and media attention to child rights issues, particularly violence against children.

8. We call on UNICEF and the World Conference of Religions for Peace to facilitate the sharing of information and developing of resources to assist our communities to more effectively address violence against children.