



**FAITH ACTION**  
**for Children on the Move**

## A theological foundation and framework for partnering for and with Children on the Move: **A Christian perspective**

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### Ending Violence Against Children on the Move

The following reflections offer a theological approach and framework for the motivation and mobilization of faith-based organizations to partner together to act for and with children on the move.

#### The Commitment to Saving Lives

Working for and with migrants is about saving and protecting lives and fostering the dignity of vulnerable humanity. As faith-based organizations, we must stand in solidarity to our calling to affirm life, respond to current humanitarian crises and reflect the best of humanity. Being human requires the relinquishing and renunciation of violence. Violence undermines and negates human dignity.

Our respect for others is rooted in the belief that humans are created in the image of God, endowed with infinite dignity.

Instrumentalising and exploiting fellow human beings dehumanizes both perpetrators and victims. Human trafficking, organ trafficking, extra-judicial killings, wars, conquests, violations and violence of any kind are expressions of evil that disfigure the noble image of God in humans.

When physical, emotional, intellectual, or social violence takes the form of criminalization or discrimination against migrants, strangers and needy persons, it is inhumane. This violence reaches its worst expression when directed against children. Violence against children, who are made in God's image, is inhumane and an insult to God. Discrimination and criminalization of displaced children should never be a norm or even an exception. Welcoming the stranger, especially children, is a moral imperative. It is required for societies to be just and righteous.

### The Intolerable Facts and Global Framework:

In 2016 alone, 1 billion children around the world experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence. Globally, one in four children suffer physical abuse, one in five girls are sexually abused at least once in their lifetime, and more than 240 million children live in countries affected by conflict. (The Global Epidemic of Violence Against Children).<sup>2</sup>

Current trends had shown that an estimated 2 million children could be killed by violence between now and 2030.

The UN General Assembly Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) concluded its general discussion by stating that child migrants and refugees are especially vulnerable to violence during humanitarian crises.<sup>3</sup> The draft resolution was focused on eliminating all forms of violence against children.

The "Initiative for Child Rights: About the Initiative on Child Rights in the Global Compacts" states:

Today, nearly 50 million children have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced. Every day and in every region, these children face a variety of rights violations, from exploitation and violence to being separated from their families, detained because of their migration status and deprived of essential protections and services. These abuses constitute a grave human rights crisis.<sup>4</sup>

Children experience abductions, child prostitution, child pornography, forced labor, slavery, forced marriages, physical abuses and even death. Humanitarian crises can exacerbate these inhumane and degrading practices. Children, and particularly children on the move, are identified as high-risk populations, targeted for human and labor trafficking.<sup>5</sup>

1 Dr. Ganoune Diop is Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association and Director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He also serves as Secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions.

2 See Susan Hillis, James Mercy, Adaugo Amobi, Howard Kress, "Global Prevalence of Past -year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates." Review Article from the American Academy of Pediatrics January 2016.

3 See GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE SEVENTY-FIRST SESSION, 15TH & 16TH MEETINGS (AM & PM)

4 <https://www.childrenonthemove.org>. The Initiative is driven by a civil society-led steering committee, which is co-convened by Save the Children and Terre des Hommes and includes non-governmental and philanthropic organizations, multilateral institutions and experts. The Initiative builds on six key areas of child rights outlined in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted at the high-level Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016. These areas are: non-discrimination and integration; best interests of the child; children's access to services; ending child immigration detention; durable solutions; child protection. Since the adoption of the New York Declaration in late 2016, the Initiative has organised a Global Conference on Children on the Move (12-13 June 2017, Berlin) and its members are now actively engaged in the intergovernmental negotiations and formal consultations around the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.

6 Jill Domoney, Louise M. Howard, Melanie Abas, Matthew Broadbent and Sian Oram. BMC Psychiatry 2015 15:289 see <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-015-0679-3>.

The international community has the moral duty to respond. Faith-based organizations are partnering to alleviate suffering, end violence against children and develop and implement concrete plans of action for a necessary and urgent life-saving endeavor; providing hospitality and assistance to children on the move.

## The Call for Responses and Partnerships to End Violence Against Children

### International Organizations

The detailed review article on the global prevalence of violence against children ends with the following words:

“The time is ripe for the newly-established Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to catalyze multi-stakeholder investments in expansive solutions for a billion children.”<sup>6</sup>

The United Nations has launched a new Agenda for Sustainable Development to end all forms of violence against children.<sup>7</sup>

Faith-based organizations have been mobilized. Humanitarian and charitable organizations are showing the best face of the human family. Concrete actions are responding to the urgent need to end violence against children on the move.

### Faith-based Responses

Any given religion can be measured by how vulnerable members of the human family are protected, cared for, respected and related to with dignity. Faith-based organizations are morally compelled to respond and reverse this global epidemic of violence against children.

Several faith-based organizations have adopted the mandate to work for children.<sup>8</sup> World Vision a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice, found it urgent and fitting to convene a partnership with several other faith-based and humanitarian organizations on behalf of children on the move.

On May 9, 10 and 11, 2017, in Panama City, Panama, ARIGATOU International organized the Global Network of Religions for Children 5th Forum entitled “Ending Violence Against Children: Faith Communities in Action.”

These initiatives are coalescing in a concerted global effort to show solidarity to children on the move and children experiencing violence.

## Moral and Experiential Motivations: A Biblical Christian Perspective

Several Christian faith-based organizations draw their motivations from the God of Biblical Scriptures, looking to the model of Jesus. At the core of the Christian faith, followers or disciples are called to mirror the attitudes and actions of the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Throughout Scripture, God provides a model to imitate when it comes to relationships with migrants, displaced persons and asylum seekers.

God is the protector and provider for widows and orphans. The Biblical narrative outlines clear covenant stipulations which demanded protection and provision for vulnerable members of covenant society. This was a matter of justice, foundational for a peaceful and flourishing society. Life in dignity requires freedom from destitution. These values, upheld as pillars of the United Nations and agreed on by a large coalition of representatives of nations and peoples, include peace and security, justice and development, and human rights in terms of individual liberty, personal equality and life in dignity. These values find their roots in the character, will and purposes of the God revealed in the Bible.

Yahweh, the God of Ancient Israel, gave specific instructions that those with no inheritance or portion of land and resources should not be neglected. “You shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you” (Deut. 14:27).

The text of Deuteronomy expands as follows:

*At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year and shall deposit it in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do (Deut. 14:28-29).*

God values every human being. This value is particularly highlighted when it comes to society’s most vulnerable people. God’s special care for the powerless, poor or vulnerable—including infants and children—urges believers and all people of good will to adopt what could be called preference for care for children, especially those at risk, such as children on the move.

Moreover, the sacred value of every human being created in the image of God is the foundation for respect and honor. This includes every infant, every child, every young person, who depends on other members of the human family to survive.

6 Ibid.

7 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations General Assembly, Seventieth Session, September 18, 2015; New York, NY.

8 The impressive number of members of the steering committee of the Initiative for child rights in the global compacts are as follows: Caritas Internationalis; Child Fund Alliance; Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW); Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC); Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants; Defense for Children International (DCI); Destination Unknown Campaign; Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC); International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA); International Detention Coalition (IDC); International Organization for Migration (IOM); International Social Service (ISS); Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Mercy Corps; Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA); Mixed Migration Platform (MMP); NGO Committee on Migration; Norwegian Refugee Council; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Plan International; Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM); Public Services International (PSI); Save the Children; SOS Children’s Villages; Terre des Hommes; United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); World Vision

The Bible assumes the duties of righteous people include helping people in distress. During the time of Job, it was deemed inhumane not to help the unfortunate. It was unethical not to serve those in need to develop autonomy and to secure decent human existence. It was unthinkable and utterly deplorable not to assist individuals experiencing broken and indecent lives, to those lacking the bare necessities of life.

*To the weary you have given no water to drink,  
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.  
But the earth belongs to the mighty man,  
And the honorable man dwells in it.  
You have sent widows away empty,  
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed (Job 22:7-9).*

Ancient Israel's prophets key indictments addressed injustices against widows, orphans, the poor and the needy who God is committed to protect.

*Woe to those who enact evil statutes  
And to those who constantly record unjust decisions,  
So as to deprive the needy of justice  
And rob the poor of My people of their rights,  
So that widows may be their spoil.  
And that they may plunder the orphans (Isaiah 10:1-2).*

The human family, particularly people of faith, has a moral imperative to care for children, especially those uprooted from familiar environments, driven away and forced to leave everything previous generations have built and passed on.

Displaced children experience early traumas. How we respond to and accompany them through healing and restoration is a test of the human family. Cruelty, death and indifference cannot have the last word. Love and compassion must win the day.

Through the prophet Micah, God expressed his expectations for all human beings:

*"He has told you, oh humans, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)*

Jesus expanded our understanding of justice when he asked his followers to go beyond the basic requirements of the Law to the fulfilment of God's absolute will which is righteousness.

The Sermon on the Mount is predicated upon the need for righteousness. Jesus insisted that without righteousness no one would enter the kingdom of heaven. The righteousness He promoted and demanded from his disciples goes beyond the demands of justice.

Righteousness goes beyond justice. Justice is a strict and exact, giving each person his due.

Righteousness implies benevolence, kindness, generosity. Justice is a form, a state of equilibrium; righteousness has a substantive associated meaning. Justice may be legal; righteousness is associated with a burning compassion for the oppressed.<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate expression of this righteousness is love. In the New Covenant, Jesus illustrated by giving his own life that the ethics of love has no limit. Love, even of enemies, is core to his teachings. Love then extends to the whole human family as an expression of love of neighbour. This is a way of embracing God's love for the whole world (John 3:16).

Children are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. Vulnerable children become the test of our humanity. When people are humane, children are safe, secure, and hopeful for better tomorrows. They are not characterized by fear, imminent danger or uncertainty that they will have their most basic needs met. The sight of poor children offends our humanity. Our response must be compassion and open hearts and hands.

Christians are called to respond to vulnerable people as though they were serving God directly.

*"I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me (Matthew 25:35,36)."*

God so identifies with the disenfranchised that he takes the case, the plight and oppression of the poor as insults against God.

*He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker,*

*But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him (Proverbs 14:31).*

Jesus own life also instructs our understanding how God views children. As an infant and child, Jesus experienced the status of a fugitive and a refugee in Egypt. Hospitality extended to his family was critical to their survival. The welcoming of Jesus' family was necessary for him to fulfill his destiny and open a future for the whole human family.

Despite resistance from his own disciples, Jesus welcomed children and saw in them signs of his kingdom. God sees children as sacred human beings.

The violence children on the move experience calls for an unprecedented mobilization of people of faith in the God who has identified with children. Faith-based organizations are partnering with God when they work for and with children on the move. The God who cares for children on the move gives us reason to hope.<sup>10</sup> Christians respond with love and compassion to children on the move, recognizing in doing so, they are indirectly dealing with God. Whoever harms them insults God (Proverbs 14:31).

Children on the move have vital gifts, experiences and contributions that will benefit the whole human family. To do so, these children must be protected, cared for and accompanied and given a chance to develop their potential.

Therefore, let us all act with boldness to ensure children are safe and developing—for their sake, as inherently made in the image of God, and for the world, that we may experience the many blessings these children have to offer us.

9 Abraham Joshua Heschel. *The Prophets*. P. 256.

10 See Gustavo Gutierrez, "Poverty, Migration, and the Option for the Poor," in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Rheological Perspectives on Migration*, Edited by Daniel G. Groody and Giocchino Campese (Notre Dame, IND: Notre Dame Press, 2009), 84.

As faith-based organizations, this is the foundation upon which we build our partnership with the God of care and with one another. The present truth of a moral imperative.

We join people of good will to provide and protect children on the move, to respect and work for the restoration of their dignity and the integrity of their families.

We celebrate every person who stands on the side of humanity, especially its most vulnerable members, children on the move.

Jesus once took a child and stood him by His side and said:

*“Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great (Luke 9:48).”*

God calls us to follow his example into partnership to end violence against children on the move. Today, we must take concrete actions to alleviate the suffering of children on the move, to embrace in a way that reverses their disenfranchisement to be hospitable and change their alienation into integration. God calls us first to love God with all one’s heart mind and soul and to love all our neighbors as ourselves especially the most vulnerable, children on the move.



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