

Religious leaders and civil society actors explore ways of ending violence against children



WCC associate general secretary Isabel Apawo Phiri speaking at a forum on violence against children, held at the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva.

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The vision of building a better world for children where they can be protected from violence and sexual abuse in families, schools and communities was strongly affirmed by representatives of both religious and secular organizations in a forum held on 27 August in Geneva, Switzerland.

Hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the Ecumenical Centre, the event was organized by Arigatou International, a global faith based non-governmental organization and ECPAT International, a global network of civil society organizations exclusively dedicated to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The forum focused on the theme “Religious Ideals and Reality: Responsibility of Leadership to Prevent Violence against Children”, featuring presentations from diverse religious perspectives.

Among the panellists was Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC associate general secretary, who offered a Christian viewpoint on the issue of violence against children. In her presentation, she argued that the church is in a position to bring transformation. “The Christian faith has the message and the leadership to deal with violence against women and children,” she said.

“A majority of children still trust the church with their secrets. Therefore the church has the capacity to reach out to abused children and perpetrators through counselling and spiritual support. This is one way of reclaiming homes, schools and churches as safe spaces through advocacy,” said Phiri.

A message by Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, president of Arigatou International, stressed the importance of working together as religious communities and civil society to end violence against children. “If there is one thing we simply cannot abide, especially as religious leaders, it is the outrageous violence against children that still occurs every day in our world today,” he said.

“There is simply no more morally urgent topic than this one.”

Miyamoto called the forum an opportunity for both religious and civil society actors to discuss how they can mobilize their broad constituencies to put an end to violence against children.

The forum participants also discussed possible areas of collaboration, such as initiatives to change social norms that contribute towards violence against children, as well as advocacy for laws and structures that can help protect children at the national level.

Among the presenters at the forum were Dr Susan Bissell, director of Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, UNICEF; John Carr, senior advisor on Children Online, ECPAT International; Dr Heidi Hadsell, president of Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, United States; Michael Moran of Interpol, assistant director at Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation; Rabbi Diana Gerson, programme director, The New York Board of Rabbis; Sheikh Bentounes, Sufi master of the Alawiya Sufi Tariqat and founder of the Muslim Scouts of France; Rabbi Marc-Raphael Guedj, former Chief Rabbi of Geneva and director of the Racines and Sources Institute; Prof. Anantanand Rambachan, scholar of Hinduism and president of the Board, Arigatou International-New York.

Ani Choying Drolma, a Buddhist nun, shared spiritual reflection and prayer hymns at the forum.

[Website of the Arigatou International](#)

[Website of the ECPAT International Present](#)

[WCC child rights engagement](#)

High resolution photos may be accessed via photos.oikoumene.org

The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, today the WCC brings together 345 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 550 million Christians in over 120 countries, and works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from the [Lutheran] Church of Norway.

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