

CONSORTIUM

on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood
for the Prevention of Violence

MEMBERS

International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence



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INTRODUCTION

About the International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence

The Consortium, convened by Arigatou International, brings together civil society and faith-based organizations, religious communities, multilateral organizations, academia and individual experts to foster collaboration, share good practises and develop evidence-based and innovative approaches to integrate values-based education and spirituality in early childhood for the protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic well-being.

Background

In June 2018, Arigatou International convened individual experts and organizations working on early childhood development, child protection, education, and peacebuilding, representing faith-based organizations, civil society, international organizations, religious and spiritual communities, and academia, to form an international consortium to address the spiritual development of children in early childhood for the protection of children from violence.

Guided by the commitments made in 2017 at the Fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) by religious and spiritual leaders and organizations working for children, the Consortium was created to strengthen the role of local religious communities in offering education in positive parenting and ethical values to help families and children develop empathy, become more resilient, and grow spiritually; as well as to identify and challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate violence against children, including sexual exploitation, especially of girls.

During its first meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2018, the 20 founding members of the Consortium agreed to work together to contribute to the creation of safe, healthy and loving environments that affirm the dignity of the child, particularly in the early years. They set a vision that has guided our collective work and deliberations during the last four years.

We envision a world where the human dignity of young children is affirmed. Where children live free of violence and they are nurtured by families, caregivers and educators in safe, healthy, respectful and loving environments; where children can develop their innate spirituality and build positive relations with themselves, others and nature, thrive and reach their fullest potential.

The Consortium embarked on the challenging task of developing understanding of the often under-researched and under-invested area of child spirituality, and particularly its important role in the holistic development of children. Going further, the Consortium members envisioned the development of a practical model and approach for addressing the relation between spiritual development, the protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic well-being. The members looked at the wisdom and guiding principles found in the major religious and spiritual traditions as well as the scientific evidence on child development and child protection, employing a dialogical approach to address this task.

From 2018 through 2022, members of the Consortium engaged in a collaborative learning process involving numerous activities to foster reflection and advance knowledge on what the spiritual development of children means and requires. In this process, the Consortium benefited from literature reviews, practical work and expertise from its member organizations, scientific evidence on the impact of violence against children, and emerging research on the importance of nurturing children's spiritual well-being and ethical values for their holistic development.

The launch of the Toolkit marked the beginning of a new journey for the Consortium and its members. Four years of development have created a firm foundation for addressing the importance of children's spiritual development in holistic child development programs in the early years and the critical role that religious communities play in this task.

A movement is being sown through this Consortium, with strong bonds and collaborations across several sectors, as well as friendships, interfaith collaborations, and new understandings, which is an example of solidarity and what can happen when people join hands for the greater good of the world's children, for their present and for their future.

This Toolkit is an invitation for those who will be using and implementing it to be part of this movement and to continue taking action together to further invest in the spiritual development of children and to address violence against children in all its forms.

If you are interested to learn more, to implement or to be part of this movement, contact us at geneva@arigatouinternational.org



The Africa Early Childhood Network was created to develop and advance coherent Early Childhood Development policy development and implementation throughout the African continent. Harnessing the diversity of strong civil society organizations delivering critical programming and advocacy for young children, AfECN strengthens impact through coordinated action, driven in close collaboration and consultation with key stakeholder.



Ms. Stella Ndugire Mbugua
Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN)

Technical Advisor - Nurturing Care for ECD, Ministry of Health,
 Kenya & Africa Early Childhood Network

Stella is a Child Development Specialist with 19 years of experience in policy advocacy, high-level strategic communications and partnerships management. She offers technical support to the Division of Neonatal and Child Health at the Ministry of Health in Kenya.

Stella supported the establishment of the African Union Commission's CESA ECED Cluster (2018), coordinated by AfECN; co-founded ECD Network for Kenya and is co-published on parenting, childcare and child development themes.

She has managed program design and quality across 20 African countries in East and Southern Africa; previously worked at Aga Khan Foundation-East Africa, Parenting in Africa Network, ICS Africa, and Global Press Institute; and graduated with an MA in Child Development (Integrated Studies) from Daystar University and a double BA from The University of Nairobi.

“ How can I awaken or ignite the spiritual domain of little ones under my influence? By nurturing my own faith. Nurturing holistic development early will ensure an Africa where all children are learning, safe, healthy, happy and achieving their full potential.



Arigatou International is “All for Children” and works with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to build a better world for children. Believing that every girl and boy is a precious treasure of humanity, Arigatou International draws on universal principles of common good found in religious and spiritual traditions and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Arigatou employs interfaith and intercultural approaches to promote children’s rights and well-being, seeking to bring about positive change at all levels—from the grassroots to the global. Arigatou values children for who they are and fully involves them in its work, ensuring their safe and meaningful participation while affirming their human dignity. Arigatou International collaborates with religious leaders and faith communities, international agencies, civil society organizations, governments—and most importantly, children and young people themselves—in more than 80 countries around the world.



Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe
Arigatou International – Geneva
 Executive Director

Maria Lucia heads the strategic direction of the Ethics Education for Children initiative, and is in charge of Arigatou International’s engagement in child rights initiatives with UN agencies and mechanisms, and child rights-focused NGOs in Geneva.

Maria Lucia convenes the International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence, and the Working Group on Children and Violence of Child Rights Connect. She is currently a member of the Executive Committee of Child Rights Connect.

Maria Lucia believes in the power that children and young people have to transform their societies and the critical role that education can play in their empowerment and in creating more inclusive and peaceful societies. She holds a Master’s in Peace and Conflict Transformation, a specialization in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and a Bachelor’s degree in International Relations and Finance. María Lucia is from Colombia and lives in France. She speaks Spanish, English and French.

“ **The spiritual development of children in the early years is not only an under invested and under prioritized area in childhood development but also an often not understood and conceptualized area of human development. The work of the International Consortium is a unique and critical contribution to develop a better understanding of what the spiritual development of children is and how we can work together with religious and spiritual communities as well as civil society and international organizations to integrate it in child protection, early childhood and parenting programs.**



Ms. Vera Leal

Arigatou International – Geneva

Head of Programs

Vera Leal oversees the Programs Department of Arigatou International – Geneva. She has over fifteen years of international experience and expertise in education and child participation. Before working at Arigatou International, Vera was Secretary-General of the International Catholic Movement for Children and worked with various organizations in training in citizenship education and positive parenting.

Vera is moved by the passion to create better, safer and empowering experiences and spaces for and with children. She holds a degree in Psychology and a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resources with a Specialization in Training Management. She is from Portugal and speaks Portuguese, English, French and Spanish.

“ Children’s spiritual development is essential for children’s holistic well-being. Nurturing children’s spiritual development is often a missed element in early childhood programs, a gap filled by the unique contribution of this Toolkit.



Catholic Relief Services (CRS), is an international humanitarian agency which promotes integral human development by responding to major emergencies, fighting disease and poverty, and nurturing peaceful and just societies. CRS' agency strategy investment is in Child Health and Wellbeing, benefiting children under the age of 18 by prioritizing interventions in early childhood development (ECD) and social service systems strengthening. Our ECD goal is for all young girls and boys to be protected and valued by family and community in an environment that enables them to thrive and grow. CRS promotes a holistic approach to child well-being--with a goal of not only saving lives, but also optimizing children's physical-motor, social-emotional, and cognitive-language, and moral-spiritual development.



Dr. Selamawit Tadesse
Catholic Relief Services

Senior Technical Advisor, Early Childhood Development and Education

Prior to CRS, Selamawit worked on various capacities to support the well-being of children and families globally mainly focused in urban and rural Africa. Currently, she supports CRS' global family and community-based early childhood programs for vulnerable children, families, and communities. Key technical support includes early childhood project design, implementation, quality assessment and evaluation; reviewing and developing early childhood curriculum and tools; training and coaching stakeholders on ECD; collaborating with groups from faith-based/non-faith-based and academic institutions in early childhood research, information dissemination, conferences, and advocacy.

“ Unconditional love and care guided with playful and positive experiences are precious moments in children's flourishing physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Adults should always make time for love and affection suitable from birth and onwards.



The Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) is a global movement of United Nations agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, academia, practitioners and the private sector focused on sharing scientific and practice-based evidence on how investment in early childhood development (ECD) can contribute to sustainable peace, social cohesion and social justice. The ECPC recognizes that investing in ECD is a powerful and cost-effective strategy for reducing violence, poverty and exclusion and for building peaceful societies.



Dr. Rima Salah

Early Childhood Peace Consortium

Chair, Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC);
Assistant Clinical Professor, Yale Child Study Center;
Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations

Dr. Rima Salah serves as Chair of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium and as Voluntary Faculty at the Yale Child Study Center. Her former positions at the United Nations include: Member of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations; Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; Assistant Secretary-General of the UN; and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UN Mission-Central African Republic and Chad.

Her recent awards of distinction include the 2019 Recognition and Gratitude in Advocating for Children's Rights Around the World Award (Palestine), and the 2021 Peacemaker Award (Brigham Young University). She holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology.

“ The Toolkit could certainly contribute towards the realization of every child to her or his freedom of thought, conscience and religion.



Ms. Suna Hanöz-Penney

Early Childhood Peace Consortium

Director of Strategy, International Programs and Partnerships,
ACEV-The Mother Child Education Foundation; Chairperson, Early
Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) Policy Advocacy Working Group

Suna Hanöz-Penney works as the Director of Strategy, International Programs and Partnerships at ACEV— Mother Child Education Foundation in Istanbul, Turkey. Her work involves building collaborative partnerships, while she manages the transfer and implementation of ACEV's educational programs to local organizations in numerous countries including Cambodia, Tanzania, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil. She designs and supervises the early intervention programs for children and families implemented at both the national and international fields.

Suna is a Fulbright Scholar, received an M.A. degree in Early Childhood Education from Teachers College, Columbia University and a Master in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.

“ This Toolkit offers invaluable insights to nurture and cultivate the spirituality and well-being of children in contexts of violence.



The Fetzer Institute, based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, was founded by broadcast pioneer and Detroit Tigers baseball team owner John E. Fetzer (1901–1991). He formed the institute to support work “designed to discover and enhance the integral relationships of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of experience which foster human growth, action, and responsible improvement of the human and cosmic condition.” The Institute’s current mission is helping build the spiritual foundation for a loving world. Fetzer’s worldview centers around the sacredness of reality, which includes the “centrality of Spirit,” integration of science and spirituality, and the sacredness of all people and the planet. It supports this mission by working with thought leaders to develop programs and research projects, and issues grants in sectors including faith and spirituality, democracy, education, and organizational culture.



Dr. Xiaoan Li
Fetzer Institute
 Senior Program Officer

Xiaoan Li, Ph.D. in Higher Education and Organizational Change, is currently a Senior Program Officer at the Fetzer Institute, a private foundation in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Since 2011, Xiaoan has actively participated in the exploration of building the spiritual foundation for a loving world, being responsible for the development of new project initiatives and the management of the full life cycle of the project process within the areas of K-12 and higher education.

For Xiaoan, the purpose of education is to develop the whole person and that the primary role of parents, educators, and society is to create an environment and conditions for young people to develop and explore spiritual awareness, personal character, and social and emotional skills. Beside that, Xiaoan has also grown his interest and expertise in global consciousness and the shared sacred movement.

“ As an old saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. I love the Toolkit very much because it emphasizes the need of having an eco-systemic approach with its clear focus on how to best influence and support parents, caregivers, educators, and community members to foster children’s holistic development by nurturing their spiritual development in the early years and contributing to the prevention of violence.



Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (End Violence) It includes governments, UN agencies, international organizations, civil society, faith groups, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, research practitioners, academics, and children themselves.

Launched by the UN Secretary-General in 2016, End Violence is the only global partnership and largest fund solely dedicated to ending all forms of violence against children so that every girl and every boy grows up in a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

The End Violence Partnership is a platform for collective, evidence-based advocacy and action, working with a global coalition of more than 750 organisations across every continent and from every sector - governments, UN agencies, research institutions, international NGOs, foundations, local CSOs, private sector entities and faith networks. It includes governments, UN agencies, international organizations, civil society, faith groups, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, research practitioners, academics, and children themselves.



Ms. Stella Ayo-Odongo
Global Partnership to End Violence against Children
 Director Pathfinding

Stella Ayo-Odongo is the Director for Pathfinding Countries, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. Her areas of expertise are Child Rights, Child Protection, Social Policy expert and an advocate for social justice. Stella is a motivated leader and development practitioner with over 20 years of progressive experience in strategic leadership, development management and programme operations. She has extensive knowledge and experience advocating for vulnerable groups such as the children, youth and the elderly. Stella is a visionary pan African leader as demonstrated in the founding of national and regional level movements for social justice such as the African Wide Movement for the children, Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) and the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children (UPFC), the Uganda Child helpline all of which have made significant contributions to voicing issues of the affected.

“ By equipping faith leaders and caregivers to create safe and nurturing environment for children in their early years, the Consortium’s Toolkit will play an important role to prevent and respond to violent discipline in the home and beyond.



The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) is an international think-tank and peace NGO. The work of the Foundation is underpinned by the belief that peace is a human concept and can only be achieved when people are in touch with their own humanity. Inspired by this belief, the GHFP's core aim is to explore ways for humanity to flourish within individuals and communities and to promote broader social transformation. As a peace think-tank, the GHFP launches inquiries, both conceptual and empirical, into key issues of human concern. As an international NGO, the GHFP seeks to collaborate with global partners in convening dialogue spaces for deep encounters and mutually enriching conversations as well as in supporting and sponsoring projects that help catalyse positive changes at the grassroots level. The GHFP has been advancing the concept of Human-Centred Education and supported relevant worldwide educational programmes for over 25 years.



Dr. Scherto Gill

Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace

Senior Fellow

Scherto is Research Professor and Director of Global Humanity for Peace Institute, University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD). She is also Senior Fellow at the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP), a highly respected international think-tank. Scherto is a Life Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (FRSA). Since 2018, Scherto has been the Director of the UNESCO/GHFP partnership initiative on Collective Healing, Social Justice and Global Well-Being. She chairs the G20 Interfaith Forum's Education Working Group, and contributes to the development of Spirituality in Education initiative in the UK. She is author and co-author of numerous books and articles.

“ Spirituality has long been identified as one of the most important factors that structure human experience, beliefs, values, attitudes and actions. Thus, educators and caregivers must take spirituality seriously, and prioritise child's spiritual development from early childhood on, and take all opportunities to nourish their spiritual growth.



The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) is a center of excellence in educational research and Islamic thought whose main interest is on carrying out evidence-based research in advancing education in Muslim Societies and the dissemination of this research through publication and translation, teaching, policy recommendations, and strategic engagements. The Institute was established as a non-profit 501(c)(3) non-denominational organization in the United States of America in 1981. The headquarters are in Herndon, Virginia, in the suburbs of Washington DC.



Dr. Ilham Nasser

International Institute for Islamic Thought

Director, Human Development Program, Senior Researcher,
Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS)

Ilham Nasser, Ph.D. is a graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park, in Human Development and Child Study. She has conducted teacher training and research studies on ways to promote education and development in social and political contexts.

Dr. Nasser served as an Assistant/ Associate Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University in Virginia for 12 years. Currently, she is leading a study on well-being in Muslim majority societies. Dr. Nasser has published articles and books in education and developed curricula for young children and youth in the Middle East.

“ This tool kit is the product of a global collaboration and many group discussions and reviews. All worth it for the sake of children and a better future for all.



The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), established in 1989 in Siam (Thailand), is a network platform for more than 25 countries around the world to engage in social action for a just, healthy and peaceful world. INEB's strategic roadmap for the next 10 years includes supporting the formation of an Asian Network of Buddhists for Child Protection. This network is comprised of countries in the Mekong sub-region that focuses on children's rights and preventing violence against children. Grassroots efforts underway include a center on early childhood development and creating child-friendly monastic schools.



Mr. Somboon Chungprampree
International Network of Engaged Buddhists
 Executive Secretary

Somboon (Moo) is the Executive Secretary of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) based in Bangkok, Thailand. The scope of INEB's work is concentrated on peace, building pluralistic societies, climate and ecology, transformative learning, women's empowerment, gender equality and social inclusion. Moo has also been working to reduce violence against children and child protection since 2017, when he helped to launch the Asian Network for Child Protection with Arigatou International.

“ Today, we need a holistic approach to unite society and promote harmonious communities. The *Toolkit on Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Childhood* is one constructive step forward to achieve this by preventing violence and ensuring children's holistic well-being.



Ms. Opor Srisuwan

International Network of Engaged Buddhists

Program Officer

Opor Srisuwan’s background and experience combines peace education, with working in the area of human rights and child rights since 2006. Her other interests include gender equality, and empowering indigenous persons and refugees.

Opor works for the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) as a project coordinator of Child Protection and Women Empowerment in Thailand.

“ Protecting children from violence and finding ways to protect children is my lifelong commitment. The Toolkit has guided me to reconnect with my spirituality that allows me to pass on love and care to the next generation.



**Islamic Relief
Worldwide**

Islamic Relief is an independent humanitarian and development organization with a presence in over 40 countries around the globe. It envisages a caring world where communities are empowered, social obligations are fulfilled, and people respond as one to the suffering of others. Islamic Relief works with communities to strengthen their resilience to disasters and provides vital emergency aid when disasters occur. It helps poor people to access basic services, including education, water, and sanitation, as well as healthcare. Islamic Relief provides lasting routes out of poverty through sustainable livelihoods schemes. Their integrated approach to development is transforming communities worldwide. Islamic Relief tackles the root causes of poverty and makes sure that the world's most at risk people have a strong voice and real influence in both their programs and advocacy. Islamic Relief is also a policy leader on Islamic humanitarianism, and its research programs develop distinctive, practical approaches to the key issues that are affecting our world today.



Ms. Neelam Fida
Islamic Relief Worldwide

Head of Programme Quality, International Programmes,
Islamic Relief Worldwide

Neelam has over 17 years' experience working in the humanitarian sector. In her current capacity she is strategically driving innovative approaches and systems to generate new evidence which supports and influence IRW's global operations. Her department is responsible for developing technical capacity of country office program teams to implement, measure and ensure ongoing improved quality of programmes. She has also been responsible for implementing faith-inspired projects and programs for child protection to better understand and contextualise IRW's work. In addition, she has responsible for developing and taking forward IRW's safeguarding framework and strategy.

Neelam has a background in psychology, research, mentoring, Islamic counselling, social behaviors network therapy, organizational development, strategic planning, change management and PSEA investigator.

“ Working in a collective, collaborative and holistic manner with communities today, will secure a nurturing, loving, and protective environment for the future of children of all ages and abilities.



The Madrasa Early Childhood Programme (MECP), an affiliate of the Aga Khan Foundation, was established in East Africa in the 1980s to improve access and quality of Early Childhood care and services in marginalized communities on the Coast of Kenya, Zanzibar and Uganda.

MECP works with key ECD stakeholders to deliver Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions for children ages 0-8. MECPs have been working closely with governments to enhance delivery of quality ECD interventions focusing on supporting front-line education and health workers and influencing ECD policy and practice, including quality teacher training. To date, MECP has trained over 8,000 and reached over 1 million children.



Mr. Shafique Ssekalala
**The Madrasa Early Childhood
 Development Programme**

Program Director, Madrasa Early Childhood
 Development Programme, Uganda

Mr. Ssekalala has over 20 years of experience in Early Childhood Development work in both rural and urban communities. He currently leads the Madrasa programme an initiative of Aga Khan Foundation.

Over the years he has contributed to supporting ECD in several Districts in Uganda through capacity building, material development and technical advice to caregivers and Centre Management Committee members, parents, and other stakeholders. He has served on various ECD committees in Uganda including the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Working Group in the National Ministry of Education in Uganda (MoES), the National Technical Reference Committee of the MoES and more recently on the National Integrated ECD Technical Committee in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in Uganda.

“ **The toolkit will be such an important tool that will help caregivers nurture children in safe environments and free of violence. Specifically, the tool provides opportunities for children to safely pursue and nourish their own spiritual development.** ”



The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is an independent global advocate in favour of the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, mobilizing action and political support to achieve progress the world over. The mandate of the SRSG is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments and framed by the UN Study.



Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid

Office of the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence Against Children

Special Representative

On 30 May 2019, the Secretary-General appointed Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid (Morocco) as his Special Representative on Violence against Children. Dr. Maalla M'jid took her position on 1st July 2019.

Dr. M'jid, a medical doctor in paediatrics, has over the last three decades devoted her life to the promotion and protection of children's rights. She was Head of the Paediatric Department and Director of the Hay Hassani Mother-Child hospital in Casablanca. Dr. M'jid was a member of the Moroccan National Council on Human Rights and founder of the non-governmental organisation Bayti, the first programme addressing the situation of children living and working in the streets of Morocco.

From 2008 to 2014, she served as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Dr. M'jid also worked as an Expert-Consultant for national and international projects, strategies and policies relating to child rights' promotion and protection. She has vast experience in the development of national policies on the protection of the child, and has worked with several governments, non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations.

She also worked as a lecturer in Moroccan and international universities on child rights' protection, promotion, programming and monitoring, as well as social and development policies. A member of several regional and international non-governmental organisations and networks working for children's rights.

Dr. M'jid holds a Doctorate in general medicine from the University of Rabat, a specialization in paediatrics and neonatology from the University of Bordeaux II and a Master of Human Rights from the Human Rights Institute, Geneva. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honours for her strong commitment to protecting the rights of the child.

“ This toolkit offers an opportunity to bring together children, their caregivers, educators, and leaders and actors of faith communities to collaborate on strengthening the protective circle and nurturing and caring environment in the early childhood.



Mr. Pablo Espiniella

Office of the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence Against Children

Senior Special Assistant / Chief of Staff

Pablo Espiniella has over 20 years of experience as Human Rights Officer including leading team positions as Deputy Regional Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) for South-East Asia in Bangkok and for Europe in Brussels and assisting UN teams on the ground in the practical implementation of the Human Rights Based Approach to Development programming.

Currently, he is the Human Rights Officer/Programme Management Coordinator at the Office of the Director of the Division of Field Operations and Technical Cooperation of UN Human Rights in Geneva, and has undertaken numerous human rights monitoring missions in Myanmar, Tunisia, Colombia and Guatemala.

“ This toolkit offers an opportunity to bring together children, their caregivers, educators, and leaders and actors of faith communities to collaborate on strengthening the protective circle and nurturing and caring environment in the early childhood.



The Child's Pastoral, a CNBB (Brazilian Bishops National Conference) social action organism, bases its activities on the community organization and training community leaders who live there. They assume the task of guiding and following up the neighboring families on health, education, nutrition, and citizenship basic actions, having as goal the "full development of children, improving, because of them, their families and communities, regardless of race, color, profession, nationality, sex, religious or political beliefs." (Article 2 of the Statute)



Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann

Pastoral da Criança, Brazil

International Coordinator of Pastoral da Criança

Nelson is a physician, master in epidemiology, a doctor in public health. He worked as a lay missionary in Maranhão (1988-89), the poorest region of Brazil. He is currently the International Coordinator of Pastoral da Criança (Child's Pastoral).

Pastoral da Criança has activities in Latin America (Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Dominican Republic and Venezuela), Africa (Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Benin) and Asia (Philippines).

“ Religions can and must use their credibility and structure to promote the Full Life of all. The toolkit helps us to walk together in this direction.



Ms. Caroline Dalabona

Pastoral da Criança, Brazil

Technical Advisor for Health and Nutrition

Nutritionist, Master in Public Health. She has worked in the technical department of Pastoral da Criança since 2008. She is co-responsible for the formulation and implementation of projects, preparation of educational materials, scientific review and analysis and monitoring of nutritional and health indicators. Trainer of the following actions of the institution: Leader's Guide, Nutritional Monitoring and Food and Home Gardens.

“ The Toolkit is the realisation of a lot of dialogue and commitment of people with the great hope of protecting and promoting the lives of all children.



Sarvodaya was founded in 1958, gathering volunteers to come together and build a road in an impoverished rural village of Sri Lanka. Today, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is Sri Lanka's most broadly embedded community-based development organization network. Sarvodaya operates through a network of 25 district centers and over 3,000 legally independent village societies in districts across the country. The Sarvodaya Movement seeks a no-poverty, no-affluence society in Sri Lanka through community-based efforts and volunteerism. Rooted in ancient Sri Lankan traditions, Sarvodaya's philosophy is based on the teachings of Buddhism and celebrates the involvement Sri Lanka's religious leaders including bikkus (local monks), who play an active role in village life. However, we also take pride in sharing our mission with all who find value in the work of our organization.



Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne
Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, Sri Lanka
 President

Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne is the President of Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya is Sri Lanka's largest non-governmental grass roots development organization. Dr. Ariyaratne is a Medical Doctor and a Specialist in Community Medicine. Dr. Ariyaratne also serves at the Director General of the Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Learning (SIHL). He has extensive experience in community health, development, disaster management and peace building.

Working both at the grassroots level and at policy level, Dr. Ariyaratne has promoted child well-being and protection. Dr. Ariyaratne obtained Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree from the De La Salle University in the Philippines, and Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) degree from the Johns Hopkins University U.S.A., Master of Science M.Sc. and Doctor of Medicine (MD) in Community Medicine from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, U.K. and a Chevening Fellow at the Nuffield Institute of the Faculty of Medicine and Health of the University of Leeds.

In 2014, Dr. Ariyaratne received the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the Schwab Foundation/ World Economic Forum.

“ In a world which is threatened by climate change, wars and poverty, an integrated and holistic approach built on a strong spiritual foundation is required to ensure child well-being.



Shanti Ashram

Gandhian center for development, learning and collaboration

Shanti Ashram, an institution founded in 1986 on Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya (progress for all), is an international center for learning, development and collaboration. It accompanies communities in their efforts to move out of poverty, address inequalities, build creative leaders and ensure sustained development. Dr. Aram is deeply committed to the Gandhian spirit and convenes many initiatives that focus on community cohesion and active peace building. Today, Shanti Ashram serves over [250,000] people in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, including 70,000 vulnerable children across 100 villages in Tamil Nadu.



Dr. Vinu Aram
Shanti Ashram, India
 President

On the 30th anniversary of Shanti Ashram in 2017, Dr. Aram founded the ICPH, an innovative model of integrating primary care with public health, where the best of global knowledge steers comprehensive interventions for children. In addition to contributing to the public health discourse and policy at the national level, ICPH directly impacts the health outcomes of 20,000 vulnerable children.

Dr. Aram served on the 'Experts Committee' of the Government of Tamil Nadu in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last two decades, Dr. Aram has also collaborated with the Government of India in making several notable contributions to India's Public Health landscape.

Dr. Aram was invited to serve on the World Economic Forum's Advisory Committee on the Social Determinants of Health Platform. She also serves as Co-Moderator and Executive Committee Member of Religions for Peace-International and is a Board Member and Chairperson of KAICIID. In addition, Dr. Aram serves as the Vice Chair of the Advisory Board of Arigatou International and is a Trustee at the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation.

Dr. Aram was awarded the 2021 Leadership Award in Public Health Practice by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health – making her the first Indian to receive the award. She has been awarded distinctions by each of her alma maters.

“ Scientific evidence from the field of neurosciences and child development demonstrates clearly that the developing 'brain and body' of a growing child will benefit immensely if all dimensions of child development are given equal importance. Early childhood in a child's life journey is not only foundational but also critical in shaping adult life and human flourishing. We offer this toolkit as a resource to the global community, a contribution to the protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic well-being.



The mission of the 'Institut d'études religieuses' (IER) at the University of Montreal is to study religions and spiritualities through discursive expressions of beliefs as well as lived experiences, past and present, in their diversity and complexity. It is not only a question of describing, but above all of critically as well as empathetically analyzing and interpreting the religious and spiritual heritage of humanity. In the context of the construction/deconstruction of university knowledge, the IER combines, in a complementary way, the contributions of the sciences of religions, theology, and studies in spirituality. These three interdisciplinary fields adopt a variety of specific research postures that produce mutually fruitful results. At the IER, these three academic approaches share a hermeneutic, discursive, and contextual sensitivity with the concern for the practical repercussions of the transformations of the contemporary world.



Prof. Patrice Brodeur
University of Montreal

Associate Professor, Institute of Religious Studies, University of Montreal (Canada) & Senior Consultant, KAICIID Dialogue Centre

With over forty years of experience in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, both as an academic researcher and educator as well as an engaged Christian (Roman Catholic) practitioner, the highlights of Prof. Brodeur's career include the leadership of two interdisciplinary research teams: between 2005-2015, the Canada Research Chair on Islam, pluralism and globalization at the University of Montreal (2005-2015), which focused on past and present intra- and interreligious, as well as intercivilizational and interworldview forms of dialogue; since 2013, the development of the KAICIID Peace Map, and subsequently its integration into the KAICIID Knowledge Hub.

An esteemed author and multilingualist with over with dozens of publications (books, book chapters, articles, reports, etc.), Prof. Brodeur has received numerous fellowships, scholarships, research grants and prizes during his distinguished career. He won 1st Prize for the Social entrepreneurship venture plan competition at the University of Notre Dame Mendoza Business School (2005) and received an "Interfaith Visionary Award" from the Temple of Understanding (2010). He has also conducted over a hundred trainings mostly on dialogue on all continents.

“ There is a historically new global paradigm shift amongst numerous actors and leaders of almost all branches of religions and spiritual communities worldwide, moving away from condoning violence to espousing non-violence.



**World Council
of Churches**

The WCC is a worldwide fellowship of churches which was established in 1948 to respond together to the challenges faced by the churches and the society and for the common pursuit of justice and peace. Together with those of different faiths and the secular community the WCC condemns the misuse of religion and creates platforms for peace and reconciliation. Through its 352 member churches the WCC has access to over a half billion Christians around the world to work at the grassroots for a more equitable society.



Prof. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri
World Council of Churches
Deputy General Secretary

A Malawian by nationality, Apawo Phiri was a professor of African theology, dean and head of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, and director of the Centre for Constructive Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. She also served as editor of the Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa.

Apawo Phiri holds a master's degree in religious education from the University of Lancaster, England, and a doctorate in religious studies from University of Cape Town, South Africa. Her research and teaching interests span the fields of systematic theology with a focus on ecclesiology, mission history, studies in African-instituted churches, and African theology with a focus on African women's theology.

“ **The World Council of Churches welcomes the production of ‘Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Development in the Early Years – A Contribution to the Protection of Children from Violence and the Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being.’ At a time when children are exposed so much trauma due to violence going on in the society, they need the accompaniment of well-equipped religious leaders to guide them in the healing process and hope for a world without violence.**



Ms. Frederique Seidel

World Council of Churches

Programme Executive and Senior Adviser on Child Rights
and Manager of WCC-UNICEF Partnership

Ms. Seidel specializes in peacebuilding through child rights implementation. She initiated the development of “Churches’ Commitments to Children” and manages the global partnership between the World Council and UNICEF. Ms Seidel holds a Master’s degree of Sociology and Educational Science from the Sorbonne and Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Paris, and Freie Universität in Berlin.

Ms. Seidel worked for UNICEF for 13 years, serving as Head of Sub-Office in Kosovo, Communications Officer, Child Rights Education Programme Manager, and UNICEF Deputy Representative in Algeria. She also served as Manager for Income Monitoring & Development at the WCC, as a spokesperson for the UN and the OSCE in post-war Balkans (1996- 2001) and was a journalist for Deutsche Welle TV in Berlin. Her research focuses on climate solutions as the most urgent child protection measures of today, and on support to children affected by violence. Frederique Seidel advocates for climate-responsible finance as a vital measure to meet the short window of time described by the IPCC, to avoid irreversibility of climate destruction.

“ **All organisations which care about early childhood must ensure that their banks and pension funds do not fuel the climate emergency. The IPCC and WMO document clearly why that is a condition for children’s survival in light of the climate emergency.**



World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.



Dr. Nana Danelia
World Vision International

Spiritual Nurture of Children and Programming Advisor,
 Faith Integration and Impact

In her role, Nana provides strategic leadership and technical guidance to deepen World Vision's understanding and practice in Spiritual Nurture of Children (SNC) within programming. This includes integration of spiritual nurture of children into field strategies and programmes, sector approaches and project models. She leads creation of SNC standards, tools, resources and guidance for field offices.

Nana has over 15 years experience in development work with World Vision, having both international and grassroots level experience, including research and resources development, facilitation and capacity building, programme design and management, field experience in church and faith partnerships. She has pursued a theological education by engaging in the International Orthodox Christian Studies at Cambridge, and WV leadership development programs with London School of Theology, UK. Nana is based in Tbilisi, Georgia, having an academic background and doctorate in developing education products and services.

“ **The distinctive value of this toolkit is that it strengthens the understanding of the holistic nurture and well-being of children where spirituality is the core on which other capacities could be built. I do hope and pray that this Toolkit reaches families around the globe to help children to thrive from early years and reach their full potential, experiencing ‘fullness of life.’** ”



Dr. Viktoria Sargsyan
World Vision International
 Education Technical Advisor

Viktorya Sargsyan is an Early Childhood Development, Health and Nutrition Expert with 25+ years of professional experience spanning strategic leadership and technical advisory roles in multiple sectors across Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America. Viktorya is savvy in research, programming, DME, advocacy, fundraising with institutional donors and private foundations. She provided hands on technical advice and support to World Vision International's 40+ country offices and programs since 2003, nurturing and mentoring teams for capacity building; supported learning exchange among cross-sector practitioners and leaders; collaborated with partners, donors for programing innovation; led the development of systems, platforms and tools in support of quality programming.

Viktorya is a Medical Doctor, graduated from Yerevan State Medical University (Armenia), and has a Master's degree in Public Health gained from the American University of Armenia.

“ The Toolkit comes to life timely, when many families and children globally witness so many adversities, and little hope for future. I believe this multi-stakeholder effort will have a long, and at scale journey to bring ALL children and families, especially the most vulnerable peace and prosperity, together with other development initiatives. This toolkit is coming to support, strengthen the capacity and confidence of parents/ caregivers, and children, to nurture their spiritual abilities for holistic growth and development.

Independent Expert



Ms. Caroline Arnold

Independent Advisor

Education and Early Childhood Consultant

Caroline Arnold has 40 years of global experience. Until 2018, she spent over 12 years as Director of Education at the Aga Khan Foundation, overseeing the education and early childhood portfolio across 17 countries in South and Central Asia, Eastern and West Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

Prior to this, she spent many years living and working in the Asia-Pacific and East Africa. She has been a staff member of UNICEF, International NGOs (including Save the Children and Action Aid), and Universities in London and the Pacific.

She contributes to multiple policy fora and is the author of publications in the area of ECD, Transitions, Children's Learning, the Meaning of Learning, Inclusion and Exclusion, Community-based Rehabilitation, and State/ Non-state partnerships.

“ Well-conceived early childhood programmes are highly effective in working against deep-rooted patterns of disadvantage, marginalization and violence.

Independent Expert



Rev. Duleep De Chickera

Independent Advisor

Former Anglican Bishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Duleep de Chickera, is a founder member of the Congress of Religions and the Friday Forum in Sri Lanka; both of which have been engaged in advocacy for good governance. He formerly served on the Anglican Peace and Justice Network and the Churches Commission for International Affairs of the World Council of Churches. He was formerly the Moderator of the Inter Religious Working Group of this Commission and a member of the Anglican Oriental Orthodox conversations. His ministerial interests include Inter-Religious dialogue and solidarity, Justice and Reconciliation for Peace, the Theology of Governance, Liturgy and Life, and Asian spirituality.

He has a Bachelor's degree in Theology from Serampore, and a Master's degree in the Sociology of Education from Oxford. He and his wife Geetha, a Lawyer, live in Sri Lanka. They have three children and four grandchildren, who they enjoy immensely.

Independent Expert



Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar

University of Notre Dame - Kroc Institute for Peace Studies

Research Scholar of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding,
University of Notre Dame (USA) and Imam of the Claremont
Main Road Masjid, Cape Town, South Africa

Dr. A. Rashied Omar is a Research Scholar of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, USA, and Imam of the Claremont Main Road Masjid in Cape Town, South Africa. His research and teaching focus on the roots of religious violence and the potential of religion for constructive social engagement and interreligious peacebuilding. He is co-author of "Religion in Public Education: Options for a New South Africa" (University of Cape Town, 1994), and serves as a trustee of the Healing of Memories Institute in South Africa.

“ **The Toolkit is an excellent resource to address issues of racism, xenophobia, religious bigotry and hate speech that are now so relevant in our societies.** ”

Independent Expert



Prof. Anant Rambachan

St. Olaf College

Emeritus Professor of Religion

Professor Rambachan is a prolific writer and author of several books including *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Shankara*; *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Authority of the Vedas*; *The Advaita Worldview: God, World and Humanity*; and *A Hindu Theology of Liberation: Not-Two is Not One and Pathways to Hindu-Christian Dialogue*. The British Broadcasting Corporation aired a series of 25 of his lectures.

Prof. Rambachan has been involved in the field of interreligious relations and dialogue for over 40 years, as a Hindu participant and analyst. In 2008, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he delivered the distinguished Lambeth Interfaith Lecture in London. Professor Rambachan led the first two White House Celebration of the Hindu Festival of Diwali in 2003 and 2004.

He currently participates as a Hindu theologian in the dialogue programmes of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He serves as a co-president for Religions for Peace.

“ **Our toolkit invites us to an attitude of reverence in our relationship with children. Love and respect are the foundation of the work that we do. This, I believe, is a special gift of our religious traditions. Even as we care for them in their utter vulnerability and dependence, and nurture their spirituality as parents and teachers, we do so with respect for their inherent sacred dignity.**



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