CHURCHES’ COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN

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The World Council of Churches (WCC)

• Worldwide fellowship of churches with over 70 years of experience uniting Christians for the common pursuit of justice and peace.

• Representing over 500 million Christians in more than 120 countries.

• 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 350 member churches the WCC works at the grassroots for a more equitable society.
WCC-UNICEF global partnership

- **Nov. 2013**: WCC 10th General Assembly, declaration: «*Putting Children at the Centre*», children’s suffering witnessed by churches  
  -> churches asked the WCC for support

- **Sept. 2015**: Launch of the WCC-UNICEF global partnership to strengthen the capacity of member churches and ecumenical partners on child rights

*How can churches use their influence to improve children’s lives?*

- 16 months of consultations among member churches and partners
- *Collaboration by 235 experts (secular and religious)*
- *Theological Working Group including various denominations*
Consultations with children/youth
Result: Consensus on the Churches’ Commitments to Children (CC2C)

Invitation launched by WCC General Secretary in March 2017:

1. Promote child protection

2. Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents

3. Raise church voices for intergenerational climate justice for and with children/youth
Unprecedented number of immediate responses by churches:

200 positive responses within only 3 months

-> UNICEF supported development of Online Platform promoting mutual support around CC2C implementation:

https://commitments-to-children.oikoumene.org/
Churches commit to:

- Promote **non-violent discipline** and **positive parenting**
Churches commit to:

• Help **end harmful traditional practices**, including female genital mutilation/ cutting, early marriage, gender-based violence, and violent discipline;

*Example - Nigeria:* Up to 40 million people reached through member churches to help prevent domestic violence.
Churches commit to:

- **Advocate with local and national authorities** for prevention of violence against children and adolescents, requesting them to provide services for the protection of children and adolescents (e.g. helplines);
Churches commit to:

• Provide psychosocial support to children and adolescents in emergencies
  [http://wechoosefaithoverfear.com/](http://wechoosefaithoverfear.com/)

Examples: AGORA Genève, Eglise Protestante du Canton de Vaud (Familles-Relais),
Italian Federation of Protestant Churches, Evangelical Lutheran Church US (Guardian Angels Programme)
Churches commit to:

- Consider contributing to **alternative reports** to the UN Committee on the Right of the Child and the Universal Periodic Review;

- **Support children in giving their own views** and be heard by decision-makers at all levels of society, in religious and secular fora.
Examples of church engagement

- **United Church of Christ US**: Children supported in court case against US government, for threat caused to the planet (Juliana vs US)

- **Oeku Switzerland**: Eco-certification process of churches supporting children’s initiatives

- **Church of South India**: Green pastors and teachers supporting children’s initiatives - half a million people reached, eco-transformation
Facilitation of mutual support between partners:

- Collaboration by churches with UNICEF country offices in 12 countries (Argentina, Colombia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uruguay, Zambia, Zimbabwe)

- Promoting churches’ **inter-faith efforts for child rights**, thanks to support by Arigatou International

- Sharing of tools and good practices for implementation of CC2C: [www.oikoumene.org/children](http://www.oikoumene.org/children)
Lessons learned in relation to
The right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (CRC art.14)

- Process which led to CC2C consensus: Need for safe spaces promoting dialogues.

- Strong innovations by some churches around Commitment 2 (meaningful child participation): eg Ethiopian Protestant Church, El Salvador Methodist Church, Theopopettes (Eglise Protestante de Genève) -> Children help to focus on the essence rather than on dogma.

- Role of faith organisations in global refugee response: evidence on spiritual support as a source of healing and resilience (https://refugee.jliflc.com/refugees-forced-migration-hub/faith-related-global-compact-resources/)
