

Churches' Commitments to Children

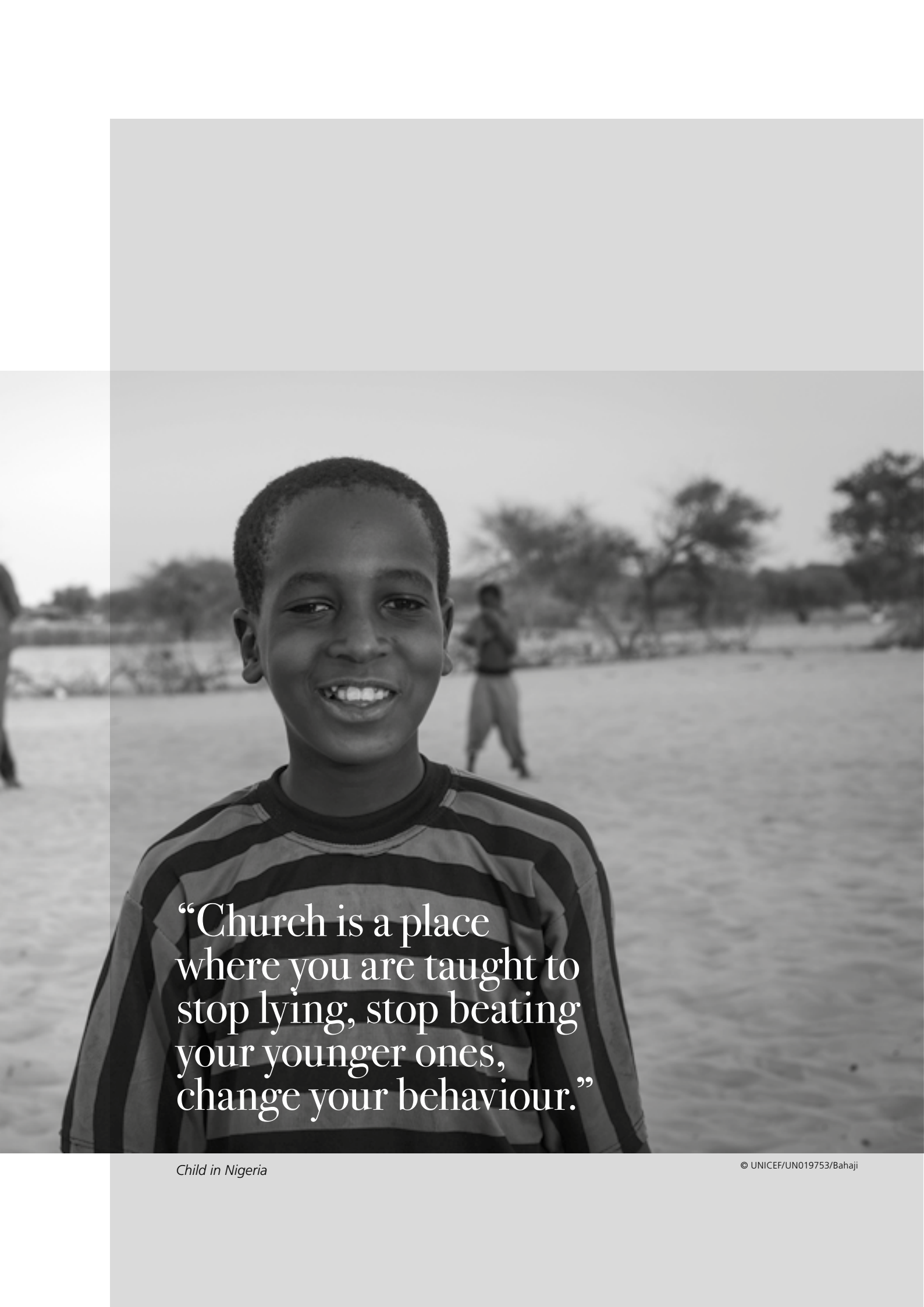
Churches uniting for children in the pilgrimage of justice and peace

“The church makes me happy,
it affects me positively,
it makes me a better person
that loves others.”

Child in Albania



World Council
of Churches



“Church is a place
where you are taught to
stop lying, stop beating
your younger ones,
change your behaviour.”

Acknowledgments

"Churches' Commitments to Children" is an open invitation to the WCC member churches and partners. It is also a living resource which will be further developed over time through the WCC on the basis of member churches' responses and experiences.

This initiative is a response to the message formulated at the 10th General Assembly of the WCC held in Busan, Korea, in November 2013 (EC 19 Report), to address the needs of children as an integral part of the ecumenical commitment to the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

Thanks go to all those who developed the message issued at the 10th Assembly, and to those who collaborated in translating it into an operational plan for action through the present document.

Gratitude goes especially to the members of the Working Group for driving the development of "Churches' Commitments to Children" since August 2015, led by Moderator Masimba Kuchera of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs¹ (CCIA). Contributions to the present document were received from 235 representatives of member churches and partner organizations, including 144 children.

Special thanks go to the members of the theological working group, who discerned the theological grounding of the Commitments.

An overview of those who made it possible to develop the present document is available in the online version (www.oikoumene.org/children).

The WCC Executive Committee acknowledges with gratitude the relationship between WCC and UNICEF as an approach for implementing this programme, where it is found useful for and by the churches.

The drafting and consultative process to develop "Churches' Commitments to Children" was initiated and coordinated by Frederique Seidel, WCC Special Advisor on Child Rights and Caterina Tino, UNICEF Partnership Specialist.

If you would like to provide feedback or suggestions for further improvements to the "Churches' Commitments to Children", you are encouraged to write to: churchesforchildren@wcc-coe.org

WCC, Geneva, March 2017

¹ www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/ccia

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1

The Goal and Background to Churches' Commitments to Children

Goal

The present document has been developed to stimulate and strengthen action with and for children by WCC member churches and partners. By upholding the "Churches' Commitments to Children", churches take a major step forward in their pilgrimage toward justice and peace with and on behalf of children.

The programme aims to:

- A Support efforts by churches to prioritize children through a series of proposed common Commitments.
- B Promote collaborative efforts to improve children's lives by sharing experiences and skills among WCC member churches, ecumenical partners, and related organizations.
- C Raise awareness of resonances that exist between Christian responsibilities towards children and children's rights as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, reducing conceptual barriers to joint virtuous action.

Background

In 2013, when the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches invited all member churches to join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, one of the 22 working groups at the Assembly was dedicated to children. Participants from 38 member churches, ecumenical partners and related organizations developed a joint declaration called "Putting Children at the Centre", which was signed by 18 member churches and partners of the WCC.

This expression of intent outlined the need to place a greater focus on children, urging the WCC to support member churches in doing so. The declaration offered a sound message, well positioned for an operational plan to translate intent into action.

Subsequently, a broad consultative process within the WCC's constituency and including partners led to the development of "Churches' Commitments to Children". The drafting of these Commitments was initiated by one of the working groups of the WCC's Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). This CCIA working group was supported by experts from member churches, UNICEF and other child-focused partner organizations. Together, they formed the Core Group of Experts whose mission was to draft the Commitments. The Group was supported by a larger network of professionals, known as the Advisory Group of Experts.

A seminar with 90 participants was held in November 2015 to review a draft of the Commitments. As a result of their recommendations, two additional consultations were organized. These were made up of:

- Children and young people in member church communities: a total of 144 children from parishes in 6 countries were directly consulted on the draft Commitments. Their contribution has been truly valued and their opinions and suggestions have been fully integrated into the revised version of the Commitments²;
- A group of 13 theologians from around the world: these scholars discerned the theological

grounding of the Commitments, explaining from a theological perspective the need to prioritize children and young people.

Based on all contributions received, a revised version of “Churches’ Commitments to Children” was presented to the WCC Central Committee in June 2016, and a further strengthened document was received and discussed by the Executive Committee in November 2016.

“The church should help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents.”

Child in South Africa

The present document is thus the result of a comprehensive participatory process, but is in no way exhaustive. The three “Commitments of Churches to Children” recognize priority areas in which churches do a lot for children and could do even more. The document represents an open invitation to the WCC member churches and partners and is a living resource for the ecumenical commitment to child wellbeing. Jesus’ embrace of children, as part of his ministry, is a model for us to engage children appropriately in all aspects of Christian life. Within Christian communities, attention to children should resonate with even deeper significance and wider reach beyond our natural, familial obligations. Jesus called for his followers to “love your neighbour as yourself” and extended this love to everyone, including children. He welcomed, healed and blessed

children and lifted them up as signs of God’s reign. In as much as we can change and become humble like them, Jesus tells us, we will enter the reign of God (Matthew 18:2–5).

The recognition that children should be brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity is set forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).³ The CRC is the international legal treaty that expresses in rights-based language the needs and strengths of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18. The Convention articulates every child’s right to basic needs, such as health, water, food, shelter, education and affection, and acknowledges children as active participants in their communities.

Christian ideas about human dignity and equality have strongly shaped the concept of human rights in the CRC and other human rights documents. Yet, as the language underscoring children’s rights has evolved, some Christians have perceived a disconnection between theological expressions of love and compassion for children and a rights-based understanding of childhood. In certain cases, churches do not see how the CRC’s language of rights dovetails with Christian beliefs and values, while some understand rights language as insufficient, or as a framework unable to capture the full scope of Christian responsibility towards children. Still others have not heard about the CRC, nor had the opportunity to reflect either on children’s rights or the churches’ responsibilities towards children.

Diversity in opinion concerning the expression of commonly-held convictions about the sanctity of children’s lives does not impede unity in virtuous action. By familiarizing themselves with the contents of the CRC, churches can speak to a broader public, prioritizing children and strengthening efforts with and on behalf of children in a variety of contexts -including neighbourhoods, schools, or national and international discussions. The present document includes references which promote understanding of the rights of children and adolescents, and makes clear the resonance with Christian theology.⁴

³ See : www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

⁴ Background material about the CRC and reference documents that outline positive relationships between biblical perspectives and child rights can be found on www.oikoumene.org/resources-children.

2

Churches' Commitments to Children

What is your Church invited to do?

The Churches' Commitments to Children outline specific actions and strategies that any church can adopt in response to pressing challenges impacting children. They are aimed at church leaders, pastors, church employees, catechists, parents, caregivers, households and church members. Church communities are encouraged to discuss them within decision-making bodies and adopt them, and make them their own, for dissemination and implementation. Support for implementation is provided on www.oikoumene.org/resources-children.

As churches you are invited to endorse the Commitments as a whole or to choose one or multiple Commitments, opting, for example, to address an issue that you find particularly important to address in your local context.

Churches which do not yet have a safeguarding policy will be especially motivated to prioritize Commitment 1a (Ensure a child-safe church environment).

The success of these initiatives will multiply when WCC members and partners share the experience, skills and results of their pilgrimage for justice and peace for and with children. Mutual support among churches and partners is greatly encouraged along this common journey.

Overview of

"Churches' Commitments to Children"

1. **Promote child protection through church communities**
 - a. Ensure a child-safe church environment
 - b. Contribute to ending violence against children and adolescents in society at large
 - c. Support child-protection in emergencies
 - d. Advocate for children's and adolescents' rights through birth registration
2. **Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents**
 - a. Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents in church activities and worship
 - b. Advocate for the recognition of children and adolescents as persons possessing agency in society at large
3. **Raise church voices for intergenerational climate justice, supporting initiatives for and with children and adolescents**
 - a. Promote systems and behaviours that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change within the church
 - b. Advocate for systems and behaviours that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change in society at large.

**“Churches’ Commitments to Children”
and related actions proposed for
implementation:**

**1. Promote child protection through
church communities**

All forms of violence against children - individual or structural neglect, sexual, physical or verbal abuse - are completely antithetical to God’s will, revealed

“If the Commitments
become a reality then
children will know
someone always cares
for them.”

Child in United Kingdom

in Holy Scripture and the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The spiritual and psychological damage children incur from such abuse and victimization cannot be denied, and is inexcusable, invoking the condemnation of Christ (Matthew 18:6). Any and all ways Christians seek to honour, support and engage children turn to ash if, within our own churches and communities, we do not protect children from harm or abuse.

We repent of the ways in which Christians and churches have engaged in violence against children or have failed to prevent it, whether these violations occur inside the home, church, or larger society. We commit to active protection of children within our church communities, our wider societies, and in emergencies.

1 a) Ensure a child-safe church environment

Christian communities - of whatever size, shape or wealth - can and must stand vigilant against the

sexual exploitation of children within our spheres of influence. Many churches have already made available clear teachings regarding the bodily integrity of children, expectations of children’s treatment in homes and congregations, and best practices for child protection in this arena. May we take up these best practices, and as Jesus found safety in Egypt as an infant, may the world’s children find sanctuary and hospitality in the household of the Christian community (Matthew 2:13–21).

We commit to prioritize the development and/or implementation of a child safeguarding policy.⁵ Such a policy and related procedures encompasses:

- Recruitment practices for and training of personnel (clergy, employees and volunteers);
- A code of conduct (including a child-friendly code of conduct) for clergy, employees, volunteers as well as children and adolescents;
- Child-friendly procedures to report an incident or a referral mechanism to ensure that action is taken in cases of suspected child abuse;
- The adoption of specific mechanisms to ensure children understand what behaviour is to be expected from church clergy, employees and volunteers, and how to report abuse should they suffer or witness it (e.g., training for children).

We further commit to:

- Promote the participation of children and adolescents in the development of child-safeguarding policies;
- Appoint a focal point for confidential support for child and adolescent victims;
- Explore the most appropriate ways to evaluate the policy’s effectiveness, and take action as needed;
- Form an advisory committee to promote a child-safe church environment which provides a space for church personnel (clergy, employees and volunteers), children and adolescents and their parents/caregivers to discuss prevention measures related to physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, family violence, sexual abuse, bullying and online risks;
- Pay special attention to the protection of children with disabilities;
- Consider appointing child mentors and family

⁵ It is recommended to consider existing tools such as Child Safeguarding Policy and Child Safeguarding Guidance (ACT Alliance) and the Framework and Standards – Safe Church Training Agreement (National Council of Churches Australia). Further examples are listed at www.oikoumene.org/resources-children.

mentors in the development of a child-friendly environment;

- Equip personnel, volunteers and community members with information on preventive measures (see www.oikoumene.org/resources-children);
- Consider existing good practices for mechanisms to monitor child protection standards and adapt these to specific contexts.

1 b) *Contribute to ending violence against children and adolescents in society at large*

Witnessing or experiencing emotional, sexual or physical violence affects a child's health, wellbeing and future. Violence against children includes: violent discipline and psychological punishment at home or in school; physical violence; neglect; bullying in person or online; and sexual violence in the home, school or community.

Violence harms not only children and families, but impacts entire societies. Its consequences can obstruct economic growth due to lost productivity, disability, and decreased quality of life – all of which can hold a nation back from fully developing. These consequences are passed down from one generation to the next. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 16.2 (End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children) and 5.3 (Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation), promote awareness about the risks and consequences of violence against children and adolescents in its many forms and reflect the multi-generational impact.

Children's needs to be nurtured and protected, as well as heard and respected, should call forth the best in us — "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). Christians can model these virtues by being in the forefront of efforts to protect children from violence. Churches have the capacity to cultivate a supportive society that respects children as persons with inherent bodily integrity and strengthens child-protection mechanisms along with other partners – including other faith groups, local institutions, government and children and adolescents themselves.

We commit to:

- Value and treat boys and girls with equal respect, as created in the image of God;
- Counsel, teach, and preach that a loving family environment is the best place for the full and harmonious development of a child. Support and promote positive parenting to prevent violence against children at home;
- Challenge behaviours and attitudes towards children and adolescents that can cause harm and violence; promote community awareness and education about the risks and consequences of violence against children and adolescents;
- Help end harmful traditional practices that may be related to socio-cultural and religious beliefs, including female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage, gender-based violence, and violent discipline;
- Advocate with local and national authorities for effective prevention of violence against children and adolescents, requesting that they provide services to protect children and adolescents from violence (e.g., helplines);
- Promote non-violent discipline of children and adolescents as a key strategy towards ending other forms of violence against children and adolescents;
- Consider contributing to alternative reports of the Committee on the Right of the Child and the Universal Periodic Review;
- Advocate for and join campaigns that raise awareness and challenge violence against girls, boys and women⁶.

1 c) *Support child protection in emergencies*

In emergency situations resulting from conflict or natural disaster, children face extreme risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Armed conflict and natural disasters force millions of children and their families to flee their homes. As a consequence, children are often separated from their families, lacking their protection at the moment they need it most. Displacement and separation of families and communities also place women and girls at increased risk of violence and abuse. Added to these risks, militarization, deteriorating living conditions, loss of livelihoods and lack of access to services - including

⁶ See for example: Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; Together For Girls Initiative; Thursdays in Black ; 19 days of activism.

health care and education - can have both immediate and long-term consequences for children, families and communities and their ability to live in dignity.

Churches can help protect children and adolescents in emergencies through preparedness and preventative measures. The global ACT Alliance (“Action by Churches Together”) exists to coordinate the work of churches in humanitarian settings. ACT forums at national and regional levels may be contacted by WCC member churches to engage in emergency preparedness.⁷

“When the Commitments will be implemented, families will have a respite and communities will become stronger in protecting children.”

Child in Indonesia

As churches, we have a moral obligation to care for children in need during emergencies and their aftermath. Together with other relevant actors, we will seek to build the capacity of staff and community groups to protect children and adolescents in emergencies, in accordance with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (see www.oikoumene.org/resources-children).

More concretely, we commit to:

- Provide psychosocial support to children and adolescents in emergencies;
- Use their voice to call upon governments to fulfil their obligation to protect children and adolescents in emergencies;
- Support appropriate non-state groups in

fulfilling their obligations to protect children and adolescents in emergencies;

- Actively involve adolescents and youth in minimizing risks during emergencies;
- Engage in interfaith dialogue to strengthen social cohesion for the protection of children and adolescents.

1 d) Advocate for children’s and adolescents’ rights through birth registration

Every child has an inherent, God-given dignity. Yet for children to be visible in the eyes of the law, birth registration is a critical administrative step through which each child is granted his or her first form of legal identity. This legal recognition allows them to go to school, get medical treatment, apply for a job as an adult, own property, vote, etc. Without a birth certificate, children and adolescents - especially those living at the margins of society - may be denied these basic rights. Furthermore, without a legal identity children and adolescents face greater risk of other rights violations, including child-marriage, trafficking and forced labour. Birth registration is also an important means to prevent statelessness. It indicates where a person was born and who his/her parents are - key pieces of information which may be needed to establish which country’s nationality a child can acquire.

Churches can play a powerful role in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 (By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration). Importantly, they can pay special attention to children and adolescents at risk of statelessness.

In particular, we commit to:

- Record important life events, especially baptisms. These records can be useful evidence in support of birth registration and nationality processes;
- Advocate with national and local authorities for the establishment of free and accessible birth registration procedures where they do not currently exist, and for the full and non-discriminatory implementation of existing procedures;

⁷ The ACT Alliance is committed to working ecumenically, collaborating with all those who share similar objectives. Country-based ACT Alliance forums collaborate with the broader ecumenical family, including churches that are not members of the alliance, as well as other stakeholders in humanitarian preparedness and response. Churches endorsing the Commitments may contact country-based ACT forums where they exist (see <http://actalliance.org/about/forums/>) or the regional ACT Secretariat focal point (<http://actalliance.org/about/secretariat/>) to ensure their child protection efforts are coordinated within the broader ecumenical response.

- Raise awareness in our communities about the importance of registering births and of the relevant procedures, using the pulpit, television, radio and other forms of communication;
- Advocate for gender justice in legislation – both men and women should be able to transfer nationality to their children, as opposed to just men, as is the case in many countries;
- Advocate for birth registration among refugees. Registering these births establishes a legal record of place of birth and a child's parents, information upon which acquisition of nationality is based. Without valid birth registration, a country may question a child's nationality; thus children born as refugees could be denied the right to reside in their families' country of origin without official documentation validating their nationality claims.

2. Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents

Decisions infused with the perspectives of children and adolescents are more relevant, more effective and more sustainable. And by giving children and adolescents the opportunity to help find solutions to problems that affect them, the decisions they inform have greater impact and meaning.

Child participation is a way for children to learn and grow into the communities they are a part of: through participation, children acquire skills, build competence, develop aspirations and gain confidence. By listening to children and showing them respect, it teaches them the importance of respecting others. If children are given the chance to share their ideas and are taken seriously, they learn that others, too, deserve to be heard.

Listening is a way of resolving conflict, finding solutions and promoting understanding - all of which are beneficial for family life. Listening is likewise a conduit of the Holy Spirit; decision-making that considers all points of view, resulting from healthy discussion and mutual respect, is a charism of a healthy church.

We repent that too often we have not honoured children's due dignity, contributions, voices and spiritual wisdom. We sometimes marginalize them, as if they have little or nothing to contribute to the life of households, churches, communities and society. Even

“We were shocked to learn that babies don't all get birth certificates and that this precludes them from medicine and schooling.”

Child in South Africa

as we seek to talk about God's love with children, we often view them solely as recipients of teaching and care and not persons possessing agency and their own relationships with God.

Let us provide secure and welcoming spaces where the voices of children are heard and the agency of children is recognized and encouraged.

2 a) Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents in church activities and worship

Let us be diligent to encourage and include the presence and perspectives of children in our common life, honouring them as important members of the Body of Christ. Worship with children in our midst recalls us to humility and our shared status as children of God.

Recognizing intergenerational dialogue as a priority that is deeply anchored in Christian values and theological analysis, let us seek to engage children, adolescents and their families or caregivers proactively in church life.

We commit to:

- Include training on children's developmental realities and spiritual, psychological, social, and physical needs as an integral part of curricula and formation/refresher courses for pastors, church leaders and church council members;
- Use, promote and develop further complementary worship resources with

particular relevance for children and adolescents, and their families or caregivers, in accordance with their own traditions; make children of all ages and their families feel welcome, and ensure the liturgy is accessible and addresses the realities and challenges of their lives;

“In their sermons pastors should use a language that we can understand and not make us bored.”

Child in Nigeria

- Ensure the needs of children and adolescents with disabilities are taken into account in all aspects of the church’s life, including when planning and implementing activities;
- Encourage congregations to use innovative approaches which encourage children to share their views, ideas and concerns of children (see www.oikoumene.org/resources-children for examples);
- Pay special attention to the needs and interests of children and adolescents and their families/caregivers in the development of church activities and decisions. Children and adolescents and their families/caregivers should be consulted in the design of all programmes impacting them;
- Support the participation of children speaking minority languages.

“Churches should do more for children with disabilities.”

Child in South Africa

2 b) Advocate for the recognition of children and adolescents as persons possessing agency in society at large

Let us continue to develop communities where we encourage and engage children and youth in the respectful and healthy manner that befits and creates a just society, where we assert that they are not diminished or ridiculed due to age (1 Tim 4:12).

Recognizing that children and adolescents who feel safe, valued and inspired by their churches will reach out to their peers and promote their participation, we commit to:

- Promote awareness and understanding of the importance of children and adolescents as stakeholders within society, their right to be heard, and of their ability to contribute to decisions affecting their lives;
- Help leverage the potential of children and adolescents as effective advocates in their communities and actors of change in society at large by planning and carrying out targeted outreach activities;
- Claim opportunities to advocate for meaningful participation of children and adolescents in decisions affecting their lives, including through alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Universal Periodic Review;
- Empower girls and boys by ensuring access to critical information, including their rights, online safety, responding to inappropriate and violent behaviour. Furthermore, we commit to including children within decision-making and planning processes, providing them with opportunities to address issues of concern.
- Support children and adolescents in reaching out to decision-makers and the general public so that their views and ideas may be heard and taken into account;
- Explore opportunities for local and national education partnerships, including through the media, to engage children and adolescents to share their views and to raise the profile of child and adolescent rights.

3. Raise church voices for intergenerational climate justice, supporting initiatives for and with children and adolescents

The ability of children and all living things to flourish is threatened through neglect and exploitation of our planet: climate change, loss of biodiversity and the pollution of air, water and soil endanger children and families around the world.

Children are more exposed than adults to the impacts of climate change. They are more likely to get injured or die during disasters, such as tropical storms and floods. Children are the most affected by diseases which increase with climate change and pollution: e.g., diarrhea, respiratory diseases, malaria and dengue fever. The impact of climate change – such as extreme weather events, displacement, or the destruction of infrastructure – can interrupt children's education. Climate change is already taking a toll on children, but its consequences will be even greater in the lives of future generations, representing a threat to their very survival.

Climate change poses a particularly severe threat to indigenous children and future generations. At the same time, indigenous people represent a vital resource in the fight against global warming and environmental degradation; their knowledge of sustainable practices and stewardship is a key element in maintaining the world's ecological richness.

We repent our failings in addressing the basic needs of children, jeopardizing their survival through inadequate provision of health-care, food, water, air and shelter. We sometimes place other priorities ahead of helping children to cultivate loving and meaningful relationships with family members and the wider village it takes to raise a child, and the natural world.

Children themselves can also be the source of excellent solutions on how to adapt to our changing climate. By promoting such ideas, we have the capacity to influence human behaviour and encourage greener options for transportation, heating and energy consumption. We can also influence decisions taken by local and national authorities with a view to developing alternative sources of energy with a low carbon footprint.

By committing to intergenerational justice we recognize that the rights of future generations are as important as the rights of children today. Today the world determines what kind of earth future generations will inherit.

3 a) **Promote systems and behaviours that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change within the church**

As Christian communities work to ensure children's survival and to repair the tapestry of creation, we remember the abundance God prepared for all living things at the beginning of the world. Let us restore children to nature - ensuring access, enjoyment and participation in its healing. And let us restore nature

“What would Jesus think about how we treat the earth?”

Child in South Africa

to children, protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, and reducing our environmental footprint on the earth. In this labour of transformation, let us acknowledge with the psalmist, “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). The needs of humanity and all living things have been provided for us by our Creator - may we be faithful stewards of this bounty.

Let us model excellent ecological stewardship within our churches and to the world by promoting systems and behaviour that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change, for this earth has been given to us to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15).

In particular, we commit to:

- Support theological efforts that articulate, using the resources of our particular traditions, Christian stewardship of the earth and promote behaviour change among members of the church community for low emission, climate resilient choices.(e.g., eco-friendly buildings,

- divestment from fossil fuels, recycling, eco-friendly means of transport);
- Help children understand that their responsibilities toward the environment are an integral part of their faith, through curricula for church-run schools and Sunday schools.
 - Promote opportunities and training for children and adolescents to engage in advocacy and to initiate responses to climate adaptation;
 - Assess the eco-friendliness of church buildings and make adjustments where necessary. Consider establishing a system of official acknowledgment/rewards for congregations which take concrete steps to be eco-friendly;
 - Help the community anticipate and cope with climate-related changes (e.g., changing rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, increasingly intense and frequent extreme weather events) and disasters (e.g., storms, floods, droughts, heatwaves), changing disease patterns (e.g., dengue fever, malaria, Lyme disease), sea-level rise, reduced agricultural yields, and increased competition for water and energy;
 - Consult children and adolescents in this process, and allow them to actively participate in related decision-making.

3 b) Advocate for systems and behaviour that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change in society at large

“Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1-2). Christians are actively anticipating God’s reign of justice and peace and the new creation to come. They act now for reconciliation with creation.

Therefore, wherever possible, we will advocate for systems and behaviours that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change in society at large. We commit to:

- Urge local and national governments to undertake concrete actions that address climate change and to comply with international commitments;
- Speak out as a moral voice to promote moving towards a low-emission global society by - for example - advocating with local or national authorities for the integration of climate change measures into policies and strategies;
- Advocate for climate resilience within the broader community so children’s needs can be met despite the worsening impacts of climate change. In particular, schools, medical facilities, energy supply, food availability and transportation systems need to withstand anticipated changes resulting from climate change;
- Promote children to be at the centre of plans and programmes for adapting to climate change within public and interfaith dialogues.



In the process of developing these Commitments, many tools crafted by churches and partners were shared with the WCC. An overview of downloadable resources and useful links of interest for each Commitments can be found on

www.oikoumene.org/resources-children.

Within this collection you are encouraged to find tools of particular interest for your local context and your priorities.

3

Appendices

Appendix 1 **WCC's history related to children**

Responding to urgent requests from some member churches, the WCC has organized three children's consultations since 1996:

1. **1996: In Geneva, Switzerland**, with children from five continents and partner organizations. This focussed on listening to street children and developing responses by churches to support them. The group explored ways in which children can continue to work with the WCC around mutual objectives on behalf of the world's children through the creation of a global child-to-child network directly related to the WCC. The report "We can help each other" was submitted to the Central Committee in September 1996. It outlined the discussion points and the action children, churches, the WCC and international organizations can take on behalf of the world's children. This report led to a Resolution on Children adopted by Central Committee, September 1996, affirming the direction of its Unit "Sharing and Service" on children's rights. At the invitation of the WCC, children participated in a number of international meetings that year, including the Central Committee meeting in September 1996. The Central Committee adopted a statement on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 1997.

2. **In 1997, in Brazil**, to discuss the formation of an international children's network and to provide advocacy and leadership training sessions. The children in this consultation were empowered to be effective members of the future International Children's Network. Back in their home countries they

were supported to organize several events to share their experience with other children and build up their national networks.

3. **1998: In Harare, Zimbabwe**, during the 8th Assembly of the WCC: Children and organizations that had attended the two previous conferences were invited to share their experiences. A special event was organized titled, "The Dignity of Children". This included children from different parts of the world, among them street children from Harare and various villages in Zimbabwe. Participants prepared a joint message for the Programme Guidelines Committee, requesting their support and leadership. They challenged the WCC and all its member churches to promote the participation of children, recognize the UN CRC and to support the development of an "International Global Ecumenical Children's Network".

Appendix 2 **WCC 10th Assembly outcome document** **"Putting Children at the Centre"**

WCC 10th Assembly **Busan, November 2013**

Inspired by Korean children's songs, music and beautiful drawings on peace, we have reaffirmed our commitment for the rights and dignity of all children.

We affirm that their dignity comes from their creation in God's own image. They are precious human beings with rights that need to be guaranteed and protected by our families, our societies and our churches. When Jesus called a child and put that child in the centre (Mathews 18:1-5), he not only demonstrated

extraordinary respect for children, but he upheld their inherent human dignity and challenged his disciples to learn from them.

The increasing deterioration of the environment surrounding our children must be taken seriously. Although many efforts have been made by Intergovernmental organizations, interfaith networks, governments, NGOs and churches, millions of children still suffer from poverty, displacement and the effects of migration, child labour, sexual abuse and prostitution, discrimination, child-to-child violence and the everyday violence of corporal punishment.

Children living in developed societies suffer from loneliness; in many cases they are denied their very right to a childhood by being forced to enter a very competitive style of life from an early age. Too many children are dying in civil wars and conflicts. Their cries and suffering challenge our faith and consciences.

We are grateful for those churches all over the world that have offered shelter to children, to those who are healing their wounds and empowering them through participation and citizenship. We acknowledge with sadness that some other churches have not advocated for children's rights, nor have they stood in solidarity with marginalized and indigenous children. We are concerned that our churches have not always provided a safe environment, or that they have remained silent about child abuse.

We see as a sign of hope that empowered girls and boys are raising their voices and bringing about positive changes as active citizens of today and tomorrow. They increasingly exercise their right to participation, especially in decisions that affect their lives.

In the accomplishment of God's mission, our churches, ecumenical bodies, interfaith network, NGOs and intergovernmental organizations have to respond to the ethical, moral and spiritual imperative to uphold children's dignity and do more by:

- Respecting, valuing and protecting all children regardless of race, religion, or gender, creating a healthy, peaceful and inclusive environment – free from discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse.
- Putting children at the centre, listening to their voices and providing opportunities for participation as subjects in the life of the church and community.

- Engaging in concrete actions of healing and solidarity with children.
- Offering refuge and shelter to children, focusing on those who are most at risk and discriminated against.
- Nurturing children's spirituality and joining with others in prayer and action for and with them.
- Advocating for their rights with governments and other bodies that influence policy change.
- Holding hands with children and creating new forms of partnership with them based on full recognition of their capacities, rights and responsibilities.
- Offering spaces for reflection and sharing of good practices.
- Encouraging positive parenting so that children may grow in an atmosphere of respect, love and compassion.
- Working with others in the global movement to prohibit and eliminate corporal punishment of children.
- Using the scriptures to promote peace, justice and non-violence in living with children.
- Building partnerships with intergovernmental organizations, ecumenical partners and other faith communities and networks as well as alliances for promoting children's rights.

Busan, South Korea. 8 November 2013

This message was signed by the following organizations:

- Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)
- Pacific Conference of Churches
- Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI)
- All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)
- Churches' Network for Non-violence
- Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- Global Network of Religions for Children
- Ecumenical Center for Women's Studies in Cuba
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
- Methodist Church in Britain
- Toraja Church (PP SMGT)
- OROSA- Orissa Forum for Social Action – India
- Consejo Unido de Educacion Cristiana – Argentina
- Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia
- Parable Cambodia
- Moravian Church – Nicaragua
- Christian Council of Churches – Puerto Rico
- Argentinian Federation of Evangelical Churches
- Parable Cambodia Ministries

Appendix 3 The Consultative Drafting Process

A broad consultative process within the WCC's constituency and including partners led to the development of the "Churches' Commitments to Children". The main steps which led to the present version are:

- 11 August 2015: Working Group 2 of the WCC's Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) holds its first conference call and accepts to lead the process of developing "Churches' Commitments to Children". This CCIA working group was supported by experts from member churches, UNICEF and other child-focused partner organizations. Together, they formed the Core Group of Experts whose mission was to draft the Commitments. The Group was supported by a larger network of professionals, known as the Advisory Group of Experts. The Working Group subsequently held ten conference calls in the process of drafting the document. The Working Group Moderator is Masimba Kuchera, United Church of Christ, Zimbabwe, CCIA Commissioner.
- 19-20 November 2015, Geneva, Switzerland: A seminar with 90 participants was held in review a draft of the Commitments.
- 14-15 April 2016, Geneva, Switzerland: A group of 13 theologians from around the world discerned the theological grounding of the Commitments, explaining from a theological perspective the need to prioritize children and young people.
- June 2016, Trondheim, Norway: The draft document was presented to the WCC Central Committee for discussion and feedback. A plenary was held on child rights, providing testimonials from member churches engaged for child wellbeing.
- November 2016, Nanjing, China: A revised draft incorporating feedback from the WCC Central Committee was received by the WCC Executive Committee as an open invitation to the WCC member churches and partners and a living resource which needs to be further developed over time in light of member churches' responses and experience. The Executive Committee encouraged the general secretary to proceed with appropriate follow up, dissemination and reception of responses

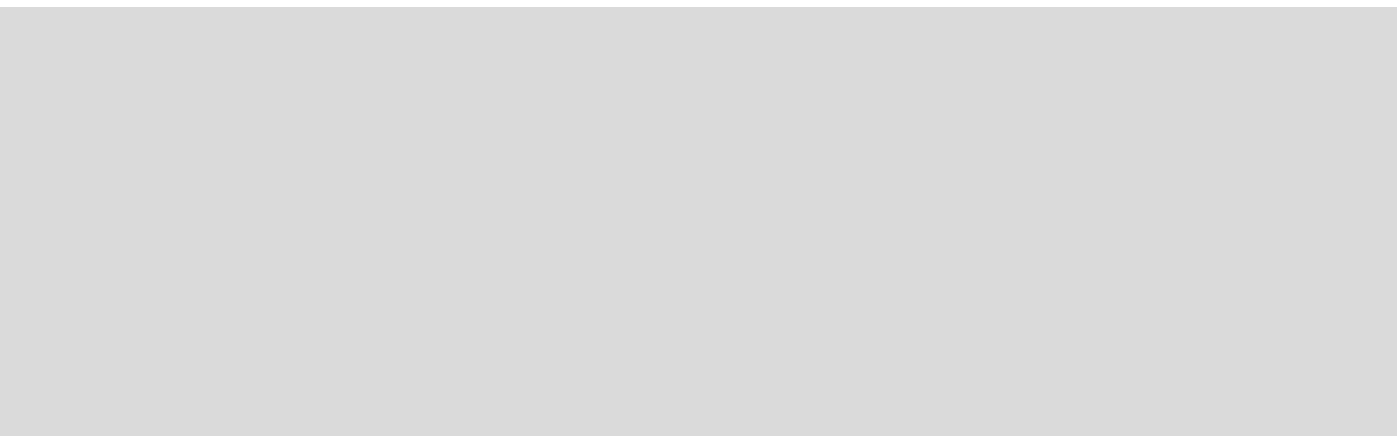
and experience from member churches and ecumenical partners according to the spirit of the Busan Assembly. It also acknowledged with gratitude the relationship between WCC and UNICEF as an approach for implementing this programme, where it is found useful for and by the churches.

Consultations with children and adolescents for input and feedback to the Commitments took place in the following towns and countries:

- **Kancheepuram, South India:** One consultation with 20 children aged 10-18 was organized and conducted by Rev. James Cecil Victor, Director, Pastoral Concerns Department at Church of South India Christ Church on 25 April 2016.
- **Liverpool, UK:** Three consultations with a total of 34 children between 5 and 16 years of age were organized and conducted by Sue Mitchell, Children & Families Missioner for the Diocese of Liverpool between 30 March and 24 April 2016.
- **Pietermaritzburg, South Africa:** Three consultations with a total of 38 children between 15 and 17 years of age were organized and conducted by Jelissa Hammond, assistant confirmation facilitator at St Luke's Church, Woodlands between 10 and 24 April 2016.
- **Sikumana Village Kupang, Indonesia:** Two consultations with a total of 26 children between 3 and 18 years of age were organized and conducted by Aryanti Malo, S.Pd, Sunday school teacher at Sion Oepura Church on 17 and 18 April 2016.
- **Tirana, Albania:** One consultation with a total of four children between 10 and 16 years of age was organized and conducted by Ekaterina Papadhropuli and Arvenola Bekteshi, SNC director and CC Manager at World Vision on 7 May 2016.
- **Abuja, Nigeria:** One consultation with a total of 22 children between 6 and 15 years of age was organized and conducted by Barr. (Mrs.) Chinelo Ngozi Anazodo, Coordinator for Women and Children at the Office of the Primate at Church of Nigeria on 1 May 2016.

Input was also provided by Helena Hahr Kamienski, theological adviser at Church of Sweden Youth, national office in **Sweden**, where further consultations took place in 2016.

Notes



“With this consultation
we feel like we are truly
part of the Parish.”

Child in South Africa

