

## PUTTING CHILDREN AT THE CENTER

Inspired by the 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 put a child in the center (Mathews 18:1-5), he not only demonstrated extraordinary respect for children, he upheld the inherent human dignity of the child and challenged his disciples to learn from children.

The increasing deterioration of the environment surrounding our children must be taken seriously. Although many efforts have been made by Intergovernmental organizations, inter-faith networks, governments, NGOs and churches, millions of children are still suffering 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 aloneness and in many cases the denial of their 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 been offering shelter to children, to those who are healing their wounds and empowering them through participation and citizenship. We acknowledge with sadness that some churches have not been advocates for children's rights or stood in solidarity with marginalized and indigenous children. We are concerned that our churches have not always provided a safe environment for children or that they have remained silent about the abuse of children.

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 are using more and more 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 inter-governmental organizations must 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 center, listening to their voices and providing opportunities for participation 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 at risk and discriminated against
- Nurturing children's spirituality and joining with others in prayers and actions for and with children
- Advocating for children's rights with governments and other bodies which influence policy changes
- Creating new forms of partnership with children based on full recognition of their capacities, rights and responsibilities
- Offering spaces for reflection and sharing of good practices
- Encouraging positive parenting where children can 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 inter-governmental organizations, ecumenical partners and other faith communities and networks as well as alliances for promoting children's rights.

Busan, South Korea. 8th November 2013

An open message from the following Ecumenical Bodies, Networks, Alliances and Advocates for the Rights of the Child:

- Argentinian Federation of Evangelical Churches
- Christian Conference of Asia
- Pacific Conference of Churches
- Latin American Council of Churches
- All Africa Conference of Churches
- Churches' Network for Non-violence
- 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
- Moravian Church – Nicaragua
- Christian Council of Churches – Puerto Rico
- Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- Parable Cambodia Ministries

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