



An End Child Poverty Update, 11th June , 2015

on **location**



Representatives from Arigatou International Initiatives, selected faith – inspired groups, development and civil society organizations, social workers , educators and religious leaders met in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and affirmed the place of faith in ending child poverty.

This was emphasized during an event organized by Arigatou International's – Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty) in collaboration with the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC)—Bosnia and Herzegovina and Association of Women for Interreligious Dialogue in Family and Society (MOZAIK).

Dr. Katherine Marshall - the Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue, in making the keynote address during the event, emphatically stated, "Ending poverty is not a dream, it is feasible and possible."

A Place for Faith

In Ending Child Poverty

Dr. Marshall further elucidated, "Poverty is not a tragedy. Poverty is not an inevitable consequence of society. It is a scandal.

She pointed out that, "There has been no country which has been successful without education. The first priority is education, the second priority is education and the third priority is education, in development work."

Dr. Marshall concluded by posing the challenge, "We should see the goal of ending child poverty as a leading global priority, but also as a personal mission for us all. It is a moral imperative of our time to end child poverty."

"You may not change the whole world, but you can change the whole world for one child at a time"



End Child Poverty mobilizes faith inspired resources to eradicate child poverty, by addressing the spiritual root causes as well as the structural causes of poverty.

This was affirmed by Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director of End Child poverty in his address.



Reflections

The meeting highlighted the following issues and priorities for children;

1. Resolving conflicts and building peace so that children can grow up with hope deserves our highest attention. Development is impossible without peace and peace is not possible without development.
2. Children should not be seen as helpless victims. They have a voice, strength, and insight.
3. Focusing on children means focusing on mothers. Fathers are of course important but gender inequalities are inextricably linked to core issues of child poverty, for girls and boys.
4. A society is judged by how it treats its weakest members for example orphans, child brides and victims of domestic violence. This is a call to focus on vulnerable children.
5. Religious communities can help in celebrating the positive aspects of cultures. They can also help to identify and change those aspects of cultures, that hold communities back and harm children.
6. Inequalities between the rich and the poor and among communities are most visible and most unacceptable where children are involved. Dealing with the issues of inequality is a central call to action.



Children are Change Agents



Mr. Kul Gautam, former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, responded to the keynote address by declaring,

"If ending poverty is our goal, we must start with children. Children are agents of change." He also spoke of the importance of education, with particular emphasis on educating girls, by stating, "An educated girl is a healthy girl, is a well-nourished girl. An educated girl brings up a happier, wealthier, more productive society". Mr. Gautam, further urged religious leaders and the world leaders to focus on ending inequality alongside ending poverty. "Equity for all God's children must be our key message," he said.

Faith Speaks >>>

Imam Midhat Cakalović (Islamic Jamaat), Priest Marko Jakovljević (Orthodox Church) and Guardian Fr. Joseph Ikic (Catholic Church), each drawing lessons from their respective religious traditions and experiences, also spoke about the role of faith in eradicating child poverty. Priest Marko Jakovljević reiterated that, "Poverty deprives children of many rights and it is transferred from one generation to another". Imam Midhat Cakalović pointed to the role of religious communities in conflict situations, by saying, "In war our goal was to save children and allow them to live a normal life in the future and to preserve the generations which will enjoy life after the war stops."

Guardian Fr. Joseph Ikic went on to say that, "poverty will be reduced if we change in our heart, if we educate people and if we change our behavior toward the world...If we change the heart, we will change the world."

Serving as the co-moderator during the public event, Dr. Kezevino Aram, Director of Shanti Ashram – India, quoted Mahatma Gandhi stating "Poverty is the worst form of violence". Violence she said was rampant in the world and had left scars in the lives of many children. Dr. Aram also spoke of the importance of interfaith dialogue in ending child poverty and said, "Dialogue is in the essence of life. Dialogue does not only mean talking, it also means listening!"



A World Fit for Children

Set against the backdrop of a country healing from violent conflict and working toward economic recovery, the theme of “Affirming the Place of Faith in Ending Child Poverty” was both timely and a call to practical action. By drawing participants from the Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu religious traditions; from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, USA, France and Kenya – the meeting benefitted from rich and diverse perspectives which aimed at catalyzing the efforts of religious communities from the Balkans, in responding to this call.



In his opening remarks, Member of Parliament and the Chairman of Bosnia and Herzegovina Delegation to the Council of Europe, Hon. Senad Šepić stated, “My vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina is that of a country where children are free from poverty...therefore, I see the importance of your call ‘All for Children’.

Ms. Ismeta Begić, President of MOZAIK, co-host and co-moderator of the public event, drew a reminder of the importance of cooperation between governments and governmental institutions, religious communities, social workers, teachers, volunteers, various stakeholders and children, in addressing child poverty.

The Public Event was followed by visits to significant historical and religious institutions within the city of Sarajevo, and a children's home. Participants also visited the Children's Memorial Park in Sarajevo, for the children who were killed during the siege of Sarajevo in the early 1990's. This moving encounter placed the discussions on ending child poverty in the light of the post-conflict situation of the country.



Education Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, the Executive Director of Sarvodaya – Sri Lanka, reiterated the importance of education for children in lifting children up from poverty. He also pointed out, “Development and ending poverty is a process and not just an outcome.” Dr. Vinya continued to say “You can’t eradicate poverty without having good governance or without having the resources properly managed in the community”.

Poverty and Radicalization



The Secretary General of Arigatou International's Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, drew connection between poverty and radicalization to violent extremism. He pointed out that child poverty was one of the pull factors that lure children and youth to join extremist organizations like the Al-Shabaab. He noted therefore, that it is important to involve children and young people in developing solutions to poverty and radicalization.



final thoughts



Pupils from Visoko gave an insightful and informative presentation on how children and youth view poverty, through the use of a skit, and thereafter presented questions to the plenary. The children's views were a key component of the event and Dr. Vinu Aram, co-moderator of the public event, remarked, "You have given us big messages today; big questions to address."



The public event had been preceded by the End Child Poverty Third Interim Steering Committee Meeting, which took place on 2 June 2015. It was followed by a workshop on ending child poverty for the GNRC members from the Balkan countries. The workshop focused on introducing the pilot multi-faith guide on ending child poverty.

In closing, Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director, End Child Poverty called for action towards ending child poverty by rallying the participants in affirming, "You might not change the whole world, but you can change the whole world for one child at a time". Rev. Nyabera called upon all participants and the larger world audience to, "First do what is necessary, then do what is possible and thirdly, do what is impossible", towards ending child poverty. A commitment was made to use the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) to mobilize faith communities and other actors to engage in focused and concerted advocacy to end child poverty.



