

**WCC/CCA South Asia Consultation on 'Overcoming Violence against Children'**  
27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2004, Colombo, Sri Lanka

*Communiqué*

We, the participants of the 'WCC/CCA South Asia Consultation on Overcoming Violence against Children', representing churches and civil society organisations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka came together from 27<sup>th</sup> August – 30<sup>th</sup> August 2004 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to:

- ❖ reflect upon and express our concern about the increasing violence that our children face
- ❖ deepen our understanding from theological and country specific perspectives of this issue
- ❖ learn from and listen to one another's experiences in this field
- ❖ strive to evolve a strategy to empower our churches to take up this issue and concern.

*We regret* that our Churches have been silent spectators to the violence perpetrated against children. We can no longer afford, for the sake of our children, our future generations, to do so.

At this Consultation, we have listened to so many situations of violence that children face in each country in this region. Together we have analysed the causes for these problems and have worked out suggestions for strategic interventions to address these issues within in our churches and communities. In the light of our deliberations we make solemn affirmations and propose concrete action:

***We understand*** that:

- (1) violence against children is prevalent in every country in South Asia
- (2) the situation regarding violence against children is alarming
- (3) poverty, a negative result of colonialism and globalisation, is one of the root causes for our children living in circumstances which make them vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence
- (4) children are not a priority for most governments, a fact which is reflected in their country budget allocations
- (5) violence against children kills the person of a child and such injury goes with him/her in to adulthood
- (6) violence against children is found at home, at school, in the community and in the Church
- (7) the Church has been satisfied with simply comforting the victims (e.g. running homes) and has failed to challenge the root causes that perpetuate violence against innocent children
- (8) there are so many issues regarding children and violence that are common to all countries represented at our consultation. These include discrimination due to ethnicity or gender, child labour, child abuse and exploitation – both domestic and commercial, children infected and affected with HIV/AIDS, child marriage, social and political violence or conflict, child trafficking, street children and children of migrant workers, to name but a few.
- (9) there are also situations which children from specific countries face more than others. At this consultation we have heard particularly about war affected children in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, caste discrimination and the practice of devadasi and mathamma in India, and dowry harassment, acid throwing and honour killings in countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan)

***We express our deepest concern:***

- (1) over the trauma that children have to undergo on account of violence against them
- (2) that the society does not give enough space for the children to articulate the violence perpetuated against them

- (3) that culture, and more so religion, stands accused of promoting some of these life-negating practices against children
- (4) that the healthy and integrated – physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual - development of children is denied on account of violence
- (5) over the indifference and insensitivity of our governments and churches in addressing the issue of violence against children
- (6) over the plight of children in Afghanistan due to internal and political conflict affecting them for the past twenty-five years

***We solemnly affirm that:***

- (1) the dignity of children should be protected at all cost
- (2) childhood must be understood as an important phase in human development
- (3) societal institutions including families, schools and churches need to understand the issue of violence against children better and work to prevent it and protect children from it
- (4) alternative ways of affirming life and dignity should be found and implemented for victims of violence
- (5) children have the right to be heard and to participate in decision making on matters concerning them

***We therefore propose that:***

- (1) the Church, in keeping with her prophetic ministry, must move from charity, going beyond development to transforming action
- (2) the Church should find alternate life affirming strategies for overcoming violence against children according to local contexts
- (3) the 'Dignity of Children' programme of the WCC/CCA in South Asia be continued and strengthened through a South Asia Ecumenical Network for the Dignity of Children made up of concerned churches, civil society organisations and national ecumenical bodies.
- (4) the South Asia Ecumenical Network works with NGOs and other concerned organisations and individuals to lobby at governmental and international level for effective policy and implementation of the UN CRC.
- (5) WCC, CCA and member councils and churches to continue to promote the issue of 'Overcoming Violence Against Children' throughout the year 2005, in conjunction with the Decade to Overcoming Violence focus on Asia, such as by producing advocacy materials on violence against children or organising seminars and consultations where appropriate.
- (6) the World Council of Churches and Christian Conference of Asia monitor periodically through her regional and national counterparts, the changes effected with regard to violence against children
- (7) within the South Asian region special focus should be given to the plight of children in Afghanistan

***We urge the leaders of the Church and of church-related organisations to commit themselves to working on this issue, and particularly to take up the opportunity provided by the 'Decade to Overcome Violence' focus on Asia in 2005 as a way to highlight the issues of violence against children.***

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## ***Proposed South Asia Ecumenical Action Plan on 'Overcoming Violence Against Children'***

### **Global and Regional Level**

- WCC, CCA and member councils and churches to continue to promote the issue of 'Overcoming Violence Against Children' throughout the year 2005, in conjunction with the Decade to Overcoming Violence focus on Asia.
- WCC and CCA to produce a Bible Study Guide on 'Overcoming Violence Against Children' for use in Asia in 2005.
- WCC and CCA to organise, through the South Asia Ecumenical Network, consultations and seminars where appropriate on this issue.

### **Sub Regional Level**

- The South Asia Ecumenical Network on the Dignity of Children to focus on the issue of overcoming violence against children in the year 2005.
- This Network be facilitated and supported by Ms. Sanjana Das from CNI, in liaison with WCC and CCA, in order to ensure effective communication and dissemination of this communiqué and the Action Plan within the sub region.
- This Network will share and distribute information and resources on the issue of overcoming violence against children

### **National Level**

*We suggest that the National Ecumenical Networks which have already been set up in South Asia along with their National Ecumenical organisations and member churches consider using the following suggestions to work on overcoming violence against children, depending on their local realities and capacities:*

#### **2.1 Advocacy**

- 1.1.1 Awareness raising on child rights issues within churches through
  - a. seminars/ workshops for adults and children, leaders and laity
  - b. inclusion of child rights in curriculums – Sunday school, seminaries, women and youth groups
- 1.1.2 Supporting advocacy campaigns such as World Day Against Child Labour, etc.
- 1.1.3 Church involvement in government policy formation, legislation e.g. that governments in South Asian Countries should open up their infrastructure and service delivery systems to this concern
- 1.1.4 Creating space on official web-sites for reporting on violence against children
- 1.1.5 Creating pressure groups
- 1.1.6 Increased involvement in UN CRC process at national level, e.g. alternative reports
- 1.1.7 Creating resources for advocacy, such as manual on prevention of violence against children

#### **1.2 Networking**

- 1.2.1 Strengthening and (re) energising regional, national and local networks
- 1.2.2 Building inter faith and intra faith relations
- 1.2.3 Sharing information, data, resources and best practices
- 1.2.4 Complementing each others resources and programmes available, avoiding duplication and competition
- 1.2.5 Enabling possibilities of joint programmes on advocacy, lobbying, etc.

