

## *Faith Communities partnering Towards Ending Child Poverty*

### **Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty) – Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC)**

#### **Round Table**

**Sombor, Serbia: 28 July 2016**

#### **CONCEPT NOTE**

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#### **A World Conducive for Child Wellbeing**

Child poverty is, undoubtedly, the most brutal and unforgiving form of all poverty. It is the main underlying cause for millions of preventable child deaths each year. It is also the cause of tens of millions of children going hungry, missing out on school, being forced into child labour and suffering from limited access to health care. It often translates into exposure to violence, abuse, exploitation, or separation from family without recourse to protection or justice. Once blighted by poverty, a child may be scarred for life, and often will grow up to pass the wounds of his or her experience with poverty on to the next generation.

Moreover, since the foundation of an individual's health and well-being is laid during the first years of life, childhood is the most opportune time to break chronic poverty. Arguably little can be done to dent chronic and deeply running poverty unless the focus is first placed on getting children out of poverty. As it were, spending on a child's health; nutrition; education; and social, emotional, and cognitive development is an investment in a healthier, more literate, and ultimately, more productive and spiritually strong population.

The transition from socialism to capitalism and the path to EU, caught most of the Balkan countries off guard, and caused turmoil in the region's economy resulting in high unemployment rates. Macedonia has the highest percent population living on or below the poverty line -27.1% followed by Serbia - 24.6%, Romania - 22.40%, Bosnia and Herzegovina - 17.90% and Montenegro - 11.30 %. Albania has the lowest percent population living in danger of poverty in the Balkans. Poverty in children and the young is a considerable problem in the Balkans. For example it is estimated by the ministry of labour and social affairs that 400,000 children in Serbia are living in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

The case for refugees and internally displaced children is even worse as they are as twice as likely to be poor compared to the rest of the population.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sanja Stamenkovic (2015). Poverty in Balkan Countries. Jefferson Institute; <http://patchworkbalkan.org/node/185>

<sup>2</sup> Veselinović, P., Makojević, N & Stefanović, N. (2014). poverty as a result of transition

## Objectives:

1. To explore practical engagements and strategies for faith communities towards ending child poverty
2. To increase awareness of available community and international resources that can be utilized for ending child poverty
3. To enhance participants' understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS), in relation to addressing child poverty
4. To create understanding of the link between Child Poverty and Violence and explore mechanisms to reduce both

## Main Themes of the Meeting:

Deliberations and discussions during the meeting will be focused on two key areas;

### a) The Nexus between Child Poverty and Violence Against Children

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*"Violence against children may not always claim their lives, but it always claims their childhood."*<sup>3</sup>

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Violence against children and poverty are interlinked and it is therefore not possible to fight against one vice without confronting the other. The pressure people living in poverty go through to provide their families with food, electricity, water, books for school, clothes and so on causes extreme stress. Poor housing, poor nutrition and hygiene, lower educational achievement and poorer life prospects generally, affect self-image and perceptions of self-worth, and are likely to lead to substance dependency, spousal violence or mental health disorders- cumulatively causing parents to abuse their children. Also, poverty contributes to inadequate care of children in several ways. Children born into poverty are at a greater risk of being left unsupervised. This increases the risk of abuse and violence. Additionally, where organized criminal activity is widespread, physical violence is often common, and adolescent boys are at greater risk of becoming victims

Research shows that it is during the earlier years of living in poverty that create the greatest risk of becoming involved in violence later in life. A child growing up in a family affected by poverty when they are age 6 to 11 is at a higher risk of becoming involved in violence later than a child living in a poor family from age 12 to 14. Research indicates that neglect, physical abuse and alcohol, drugs and maltreatment are empirically linked to poverty.

At a more macro level, violence against children places an economic burden on governments. The findings on a research conducted by *Overseas Development Institute* shows that physical, psychological and sexual violence perpetrated against children costs governments globally up to

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in west balkan countries.

<sup>3</sup>Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, speaking in the event, 'Building a world that is safer for children,' September 27th 2015, UNICEF headquarters in New York : <http://freefromviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Building-a-World-that-is-Safer-for-Children.pdf>

USD 7 trillion annually- monies could be channelled to other development projects that would reduce poverty.

## **b) The Role of Faith Communities and Children in Aligning Ending Child Poverty Actions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

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*“We expressed our commitment to mobilize faith-based resources to end child poverty, to challenge the unequal distribution of resources, war and violence, poor governance and corruption, and to utilize interfaith advocacy and grassroots action to overcome poverty.” - Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International*

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For the first time, the global community has recognized the centrality of children to address global poverty. As part of the SDGs proposed to end poverty, the new agenda aims to ‘reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all dimensions according to national definitions’ by 2030. This can only be achieved when there is explicit recognition of child poverty by decision makers at all levels, with concrete and well-targeted efforts to address it.

With almost five billion people belonging to religious communities, their capacity for action is substantial. Religious communities offer a large and enduring network for the care and protection of children.

The religious resources to address poverty include spiritual, social and moral assets that address humanitarian and welfare needs; development of communities and empowering of community members; and macro level efforts targeting political and economic structures nationally and globally.

Historically, religious traditions have established many social networks and assets to fight against poverty. Community mosques, churches, temples, and shrines are focal social structures located in virtually every village, district and city. These social organizations range from assemblies designed for worship and reflection to those specifically dedicated to education, health, emergency relief, economic development and human rights, many of which have been successful in addressing poverty.

Moreover, caring and empathy are attitudes embedded across most religious traditions that serve as powerful tools in child poverty eradication. The beliefs, practices, social networks and resources of religion can instil hope, give meaning to difficult experiences and provide emotional, physical and spiritual support to affected children. Impact can be far-reaching when Child Rights efforts are grounded in the protective aspects of religious beliefs and practices in a community (UNICEF, 2012).

### **Meeting Approach:**

Various strategies will be employed to achieve the objectives of the meeting, specifically:

- 1. Two Key note addresses:** The address will explore the meaning of child poverty, highlight ways that children experience poverty and the patterns of poverty across the Balkans as well

as highlight the common drivers of poverty. The session will also discuss how the Sustainable Development Goals aiming to end extreme poverty and halve child poverty in all its dimensions can be measured and implemented. It will address challenges of child poverty, while simultaneously providing new sustainable pathways.

In addition, this session will address the nexus between poverty and violence against children and propose actions that can be taken to tackle violence against children within the context of poverty.

2. **Discussion Panel:** Comprising faith leaders, young persons and practitioners from Serbia, who will articulate their experiences and perspectives on the role of the faith communities to arrest child poverty and situate this in the overall context of the current trends including the Sustainable Development Agenda. In addition the session will highlight the central role that children and faith communities can play in ending poverty, in relation to the new SDGs.
3. **Open plenary sessions during the Roundtable discussions** The Round Table discussions are organized as an interactive dialogue with the aim of catalysing the thinking and action of the actors and their networks towards their work of ending child poverty and violence against children. There shall be an interactive question and answer dialogue sessions, incorporating the views and observations of the rest of the participants including children. In particular, the interactive session will attempt to draw on impact stories and lessons learnt by the participants, regarding faith inspired efforts to end child poverty and violence against children. The Round Table is also structured to provide excellent opportunity for networking towards ending child poverty and violence against children.
4. **Pre - Round Table Workshop (26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> July):** Prior to the Round Table, there shall be a two (2) days' workshop that shall socialize the Multi - Faith Resource Guide on Ending Child Poverty. The Resource Guide is intended to serve as a model for faith communities to engage in year-round child poverty spiritual reflection, advocacy and action. The workshop shall also lay emphasis on the nexus between poverty and violence against children – as a precursor to the GNRC 5<sup>th</sup> Forum scheduled for May 2017 in Panama City, Panama.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

Key issues, ideas and proposals that will emerge from the interactive dialogue will be consolidated into a synthesis report. The synthesis report and its recommendations on possible approaches and mechanisms will provide the basis for follow-up action to the participants, responsibility holders and other actors.

### **Participation:**

Fifty (50) participants from various faiths and religions, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) members from the Balkans, development organizations, civil society organizations, Serbia Government representatives, media and multilateral organizations.

## **About the Organizations:**

### **Arigatou International:**

Arigatou International is a non-profit organization which works to bring people from all walks of life together to build a better world for children. Arigatou International is “All for Children,” and draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to come together to address children’s issues. Arigatou International has four initiatives, namely the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), The Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty), Ethics Education for Children, and Prayer and Action for Children. The NGO is headquartered in Tokyo, Japan with offices in Nairobi, New York and Geneva; and it has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC). Find out more: [arigatouinternational.org](http://arigatouinternational.org)

### **End Child Poverty:**

The Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty) is a multi-faith, child-centered, global initiative that mobilizes faith-inspired resources to eradicate poverty affecting children. End Child Poverty aims to create a world free of child poverty, by addressing both the root causes of poverty in the human heart and the structural causes of poverty. The initiative applies three main strategies: Mitigating the root causes of poverty in the human heart through theological reflection, prayer and action; Combating structural causes of poverty through interfaith advocacy and lobbying; and undertaking replicable and sustainable grassroots projects that alleviate child poverty. Find out more: [endingchildpoverty.org](http://endingchildpoverty.org)

### **The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC):**

The Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) is a global-scale interfaith network of organizations and individuals specifically dedicated to securing the rights and well-being of children everywhere. GNRC members come together to work for and with children across the globe, implementing a wide variety of interfaith cooperation projects with each contributing their unique experience with children's issues as well as passion for the well-being of children, together building a worldwide platform for addressing the urgent challenges faced by children. The network members come from all of the world's major religions and many other spiritual traditions, and they are currently implementing 219 interfaith projects in 70 countries. Find out more: [gnrc.net](http://gnrc.net)

### **Somborski Edukativni Centar (Sombor Educational Centre):**

Somborski Edukativni Centar (SEC) is a non-profit association, established to improve the lives of children, young people and marginalized groups, through provision of support, empowerment, non-formal education, sensitization and socially responsible activism. SEC promotes the value of youth work, volunteerism and efforts towards sustainable development. SEC is a member of the GNRC and its leadership serves as the coordinator of the GNRC in Serbia. Find out more: [sec.org.rs](http://sec.org.rs)