



## Brief Report

Roundtable Discussion

# Ethics Education to Strengthen Families and Nurturing Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence Against Children

The Role of Religious Communities



Sarvodaya



Walpola  
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Brief Report of the roundtable discussion:

Ethics Education to Strengthen Families and Nurturing Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence Against Children - The Role of Religious Communities

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PANELISTS



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Representative,  
Chinmaya Mission



**Most Ven. Dhammajiva Maha Thero**  
Founder and Spiritual Leader,  
Sati Pasala Foundation



**Rt. Rev. Duleep Kamil De Chickera**  
Former Bishop,  
Anglican Church



**Mr. Tim Sutton**  
Country Representative,  
UNICEF



**Ash Sheikh S. H. M. Faleel**  
Head, Academic Programs and  
Senior Lecturer,  
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Former Vice Chairperson of the  
Committee on the Rights of the Child



**Mrs. Maria Lucia Uribe**  
Director  
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INTRODUCTION



After three decades of civil war that led to human, economic and environmental loss, displacement of families, fear of the other, exclusive narratives, and the normalization of direct, structural and cultural violence, Sri Lanka is now in a post-conflict time that requires creating the conditions for healing in the minds and hearts of people, as well as spaces to foster reconciliation in the society.

In Sri Lanka, many child protection stakeholders believe physical and humiliating punishment to be a critical issue needing urgent action. The normalization of violence as a form of punishment is considered to be widespread in schools, homes, and institutions across the country.

Families have a strong role to play as guarantors of the rights of the child. According to UNICEF, "It is during early years that the child's brain architecture is developing most rapidly, habits are formed, differences are recognized and emotional ties are built through social relationships and day to day interactions in homes and neighborhoods".

Religious leaders are well positioned to support families and caregivers to adopt parenting practices that are conducive to the healthy development of the child, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. They can support

fostering values such as empathy, respect, and compassion towards others, through religious narratives and teachings that contribute to the positive representations of others and prevent problems of alienation, construction of others as enemies, and inter-communal violence. Religious communities can support families in nurturing values and spirituality in children to develop a strong sense of identity that is inclusive.

In the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to advance universal peace and eradicate poverty, contributing towards ending all forms of violence against children, as included in target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, this roundtable discussion aims to engage in dialogue and generate learning between representatives from religious communities, government, civil society organizations, and UN agencies.

As Sri Lanka engages as a pathfinder country to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, these discussions and learning spaces become critical to accelerating action and progress towards ending violence against children in the country.

## OPENING REMARKS

Mrs. Maria Lucia Uribe opened the floor introducing Arigatou International, and briefing on its Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) Fifth Forum which took place in Panama City in May 2017, under the theme: Ending Violence Against Children - Faith Communities in Action. The Forum brought together more than 500 religious leaders, UN and government agencies, civil society organizations, children and youth, to discuss concrete and collaborative actions to end violence against children. Children and youth participation was at the center of the Forum, as 64 children and youth from 21 countries were part of the discussions. They spoke up about their role and asked to be seen not only as receivers but also as partners in ending violence against children.

**“Religious leaders can contribute to challenging cultural and social norms, as well as patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate or justify violence against children.”**

Participants at the Forum signed the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children, grieving the fact that half of the world’s children endure physical, psychological or sexual violence. While they acknowledged religion as a key factor in the wellbeing of children, they recognized that it has also been used to legitimize, justify and even perpetuate violence against children. In the same way, families and homes, which are identified as the best place for children to grow and thrive, are also the place where most abuses occur. In the Panama Declaration, participants stated that transformed religions and spiritual communities can help prevent, heal, reduce and ultimately end violence against children.

As a follow-up of the Panama Declaration, Arigatou International is developing an international program to address violence against children in family settings, to foster values and nurture spirituality in child upbringing and contribute to the development of inclusive identities in children, working together with religious communities and parents.

Mrs. Uribe underlined violence is not only experienced physically, but also through emotional abuse, rejection, humiliation, isolation, and neglect, through the structures that support gender inequality, discrimination, and the use of children as objects for abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.

She continued by pointing out how religious leaders can contribute to challenging cultural and social norms, as well as patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate or justify violence against children.

Four particular objectives rise from the discussion: (1) to reflect on the state of violence against children in Sri Lanka, particularly in the family setting and its effects on early childhood development; (2) identify the environmental and societal factors related to poverty and violence that hinder or foster the ability and possibilities for positive parenting; (3) discuss the role of religious communities in challenging cultural and social norms that justify violence, as well as their role supporting families in nurturing values and spirituality; (4) and to share good practices with the panelists and participants.

## FIRST SESSION



### PROF. SAVITRI GOONESEKERE

**Qs:** We know that reports of increasing child abuse, neglect, and exploitation are on the rise in Sri Lanka, could you give us an overview of violence against children in the family context in Sri Lanka? What are the key factors that promote violence against children in the family? And what implications does it have in children’s healthy and sound development, particularly during the early years?

Prof. Goonesekere started her intervention stating that although it is true for the most part that family is the first line of protection in Sri Lanka, there are many dysfunctional families. The incidence of violence against children in the family is very high in the country. A large evidence base shows a prevalence of incest in both migrant and local families; sexual abuse perpetrated mainly by those known to the child, as well as child prostitution driven by the marginalization of girls from the family, which has led to an increase in the school dropout rate among girls.

Evidence shows that the incidence of physical violence in school as a form of discipline is high and related to cultural costumes. Current regulations on the topic are seen only as guidelines, not as rules.

**“There is an increasing culture of greed and competitiveness among parents, which leads to physical and psychological violence.”**

Among the possible causes of violence against children, Professor Goonesekere mentioned the big breakdown of values in parental caring. There is an increasing culture of greed and competitiveness among parents, which leads to physical and psychological violence. The non-recognition of adolescents’ sexuality and absence of awareness in boys and girls of what is to have a responsible sexual behavior makes them targets of abuse. They don’t know how to protect themselves and how to behave in that area. Authoritarianism



In terms of religious communities, Professor Goonesekere reflected on how schools lack to nurture the core values of Buddhism in children, like tolerance and generosity. Children are merely asked to pass the basic Buddhist examinations, failing to learn the rich ethical values that come with this religion. Education has moved away from these values to mere ritualism and formalities. She finalized by stating that Sri Lanka requires schools to foster the core values of Buddhism in children, which are shared with all religions in the world.

in school and in the home is disabling children to voice their concerns; therefore, when a child is abused, the child has nobody to go to.

### MOST VEN. U. DHAMMAJIVA MAHA THERO

Qs: Sri Lanka is in a post-violent conflict period, after having experienced three decades of armed conflict that led the normalization of direct, structural and cultural violence, children are of course the most affected; What does Buddhist teachings offer in terms of how we can unlearn violence and create spaces within the family for the positive development of the child?

**"My radical idea is to introduce mindfulness to children, in a non-religious basis, as a preventive method before something happens."**

The speaker began by sharing the concept of mindfulness, and how he got to know this method early in life. He explained that mindfulness, in a non-religious basis, can be used as a prevention technique and as a therapeutical instrument. Mindfulness helps reaching a state of well-being, inner contentment and self-understanding. It improves focus at work, enables better mental health and emotional resilience, and that it promotes tolerance and empathy. He also described how he has introduced mindfulness to children in different settings with positive outcomes, obtaining outstanding responses.

He argued that there are several researches and studies from different organizations in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia outlining the curative and therapeutic benefits of meditation as a preventive measure. Mindfulness is widely recognized as an effective method to help overcoming stress and trauma; however, since it is so simple, political agendas and business models have become barriers in the way to teach mindfulness. He advocated to introduce mindfulness to children, not only as a remedy but as a prevention tool for its curative and therapeutical value.

He concluded by proposing to run a trial program with children, with the help of parents and teachers, and with the support of either the education or health department. This way, children would be able to count on this tool, which can help them overcome difficult situations in the case of becoming victims of abuse.



### RT. REV. DULEEP KAMIL DE CHICKERA

Qs: Religion has traditionally been a promoter of values in the family and a source of inspiration and action to raise children in a positive, caring and respectful environment, however, we also know that religion has been used to justify violence in the family and instil values that foster exclusive identities and fear of the other. From the Christian perspective, how does religion influence the choices made in the family in the upbringing of children, and how can religious teachings that justify violence in the upbringing of children be challenged and transformed?

Rev. De Chickera started his intervention by explaining how within Christianity violence against children is understood in two levels. The first level is found in the Bible, where violence translates as the invisibility or non-entity of the child, until the time of Jesus. With only a few exceptions, the child in the scriptures is seen as insignificant in the daily affairs of life and only becomes important once he reaches adulthood.

The second level is in the practice. The adult wants to make the child as an adult, he wants to "bring the child up" to the level of an adult. In this

**"Respect and dignity for the child is probably the Christian proposition on how to deal with violence against children."**

dynamic, adults speak down to the child and teach them the dos and don'ts of life. When resistance is encountered, the adult applies a corrective method which could be through violence, either physical or emotional. The Christian Church needs to recognize this type of violence in order to deal with it.

Rev. De Chickera continued by explaining how the dynamic changed in the times of Jesus. The disciples were having a discussion about who is the greatest. Jesus answered by praising a little child, "if you want to be great, you must become like a child." The child is the greatest in God's design because children are in the margins, and

Jesus' discourse emphasized the idea of bringing everyone in the margins to the center. The child completes the adult. Like nature, it's a blessing. If you harm and violate nature, then we all suffer.

He concluded by stating that respect and dignity for the child is the Christian proposition on how to deal with violence against children.

## MR. TIM SUTTON

Qs: As the leading UN agency working with children, what are UNICEF's priorities in Sri Lanka in terms of ending violence against children in early childhood and in the family context? What do you think are important nexuses and gaps? Why is the involvement of religious leaders crucial in working with stakeholders to end violence against children?

Mr. Sutton began his intervention by highlighting the critical influence that religious leaders have in developing and enhancing positive behaviors. He explained that UNICEF's priorities in Sri Lanka in this topic are to enable methods of working with religious leaders, communities, governments and civil society to end violence against children; to combat physical punishment and verbal abuse in disciplining children, and finally, to make the online environment safer for children.

**"Churches need to be the shining light, the torchbearers in preventing violence against children."**

He agreed with his counterparts on the fact that violence against children is perpetrated in the majority of the cases by people known and trusted by the children. He recognized as well the urgency to combat physical and emotional abuse in Sri Lanka, especially associated with discipline and sexual violence. Corporal punishment is prevalent and culturally accepted in Sri Lanka, and widely used to discipline children. While there are laws

on cruelty to children, there are no specific laws on corporal punishment. Mr. Sutton emphasized the need to bring social and legal pressure on perpetrators.

He reflected on the importance of religious leaders in society. The leaders of all religions command great respect among their people and their communities; they influence thinking, foster dialogue and set priorities for their communities, and are able to influence policymakers and legislation. Religious leaders are also extraordinary teachers, advocates, informal leaders, and counselors. Their words can reach beyond their own temples, therefore, they can use teachings from religious texts to emphasize the protection of children through services, worships, and lectures. Religious institutions need to change as well and become the torchbearers in preventing violence against children.

Mr. Sutton concluded by stating that UNICEF wants to work closely with religious leaders to end violence in Sri Lanka, to advocate for the prohibition of physical or humiliating punishment in all settings, and to promote positive parenting and non-violent forms of discipline.



## QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Participants posed questions to the panelist in a wide range of areas. These include inquiries on how to educate children on self-protection; how can children expose a perpetrator; why is violence sometimes consented by other family members; and what can be done when the child reaches adulthood.

Prof. Savitri Goonesekere addressed the questions by stating that schools don't usually work on strengthening the child in terms of awareness. Some schools don't have counselors and, those who do, are not reached by children because they fear being stigmatized as someone with mental issues. She suggested having qualified psychologists visiting schools and talking in school

assemblies to raise awareness among children about their own safety.

Rt. Rev. De Chickera stressed on the need to educate, both boys and girls, about their sexuality and how to protect themselves from others.

Ven. Maha Thero elaborated about education for children. He talked about mindful games and how these can assist tapping into the psychology of the child. He mentioned the possibility of training teachers to bring mindfulness into the schools in a secular context. He explained that often, children and mindfulness trainers build bonds of trust, creating a safe space for children to share their problems and concerns. Having a trustful adult to talk to can also help children in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

SECOND SESSION



DR. HIRANTHI WIJEMANNE

Qs: Early childhood is a critical period for children’s physical, emotional and social development, a key period where the foundation of ethical values and key skills - such as empathy, respect for others and non-violent conflict resolution, are formed, what is the role of parents and caregivers in this regard? What do you think are key external and internal factors in the family context in Sri Lanka that foster or hinder parents’ and caregivers’ ability to ensure the positive upbringing of children?

Dr. Wijemanne began her presentation by introducing the participants to the results of a number of researches that indicate a close relationship between the nature of a family and violence against children in early childhood. This includes many aspects such as negligence, physical abuse in the guise of discipline, corporal punishment, emotional abuse and even sexual abuse.

Children are most vulnerable when their family is in poverty, as this brings overcrowding, poor housing, low parental education, unemployment, and social isolation. Domestic violence, the use of harsh punishment, and poor inter-family relationships often exist in such circumstances.

However, violence against children can exist across ethnicity, socioeconomic status and religion.

The speaker emphasized that it has been well proven that experiences of violence, neglect or abuse during early childhood causes chronic activation of the child’s stress system. These cause biochemical effects on the brain of infants and preschool children in a manner which is critical to the fragile processes of early brain development. Such negative influences manifest in later life. The impact can prevail throughout the lifetime of individuals, leading to problems of social, emotional and psychological well-being, memory and learning capacity. Experiences related to abuse and violence in early childhood are also known to be related to risk-taking behavior in

later years, particularly during adolescence. These include depression, alcohol and drug abuse and even suicidal behavior.

The promotion of parenting skills and establishing support systems for vulnerable families can contribute to the elimination of violence within the family. This includes the active fostering of close parent-child interactions and relationships. All parents need to be knowledgeable on the basics of child development. The speaker expressed that religious leaders and communities could step up in this area, but also stressed that the State is the one with the obligation to provide this knowledge.

Dr. Wijemanne mentioned numerous studies that have been conducted on neuroscience to reveal the importance of preventing violence and neglect from birth to 18 years old. Preventing deliberate harm in the early years can enable a positive outcome on child development, unlike interventions in the later years when the damage is already done. An integrated early childhood approach is recommended. Decades of research in neuroscience and brain research clearly indicate the importance of such preventive interventions as being effective in the attainment of a positive outcome for children. This needs to be supported with good nutrition, access to health care and opportunities for play, recreation, and social interactions.

Early childhood is the most critical period in the life of a child, influencing cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, in a manner that



does not occur at any other stage. Early cognitive stimulation, including techniques which encourage the development of motor, language and thinking skills, contribute to a positive outcome. Opportunities for play and exploration are most important as these influence synaptic formation and are linked to the development of secure attachments to caregivers while building healthy relationships with other children.

**“The promotion of parenting skills and establishing support systems for vulnerable families can contribute to the elimination of violence within the family.”**

A special mention was made of children with disabilities, children in institutions, and children of unwed mothers, and rape victims, who are especially vulnerable to violence and neglect. Added protection is critical for this group. Vulnerable high-risk families need social support. Special situations include families with migrant parents, domestic violence, poverty, and single-parent families.

Better and more responsible parenting is the key to violence prevention. A supportive media in addition to public education, interaction at home level with well-trained personnel, advocacy by religious dignitaries, trained community-based workers and motivated civil society organizations have great potential to bring about a change in violence against children at homes.

The speaker closed by accentuating that all the data suggests that we must focus on protecting the child from as early as possible. Promoting positive parenting, and supporting vulnerable families will help prevent violence and build a healthy generation of children.



## BRAHMACHARI DARSHAN CHAITANYA

Qs: From the Hindu religious perspective can you provide examples of teachings that support the positive upbringing of children as well as of those that need to challenge to prevent violence against children? How can Hindu religious leaders and communities support families, particularly parents and other caregivers in creating safe environments for children?

Br. Chaitanya started his statement by quoting the poet Kahlil Gibran:

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*

*They come through you but not from you,*

*And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,*

*For they have their own thoughts.*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls,*

*For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,*

*Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

The speaker elaborated on what should be the adult's attitude towards children. He suggested that violence against children is an expression of anger, intolerance and perversion, and an effort to dominate and to obtain obedience.

Br. Chaitanya expressed that, a culture has to be based on values, and these values come from religion. From a Hindu perspective, when people have difficulties managing their anger, stress and desire, their frustration finds the path of least resistance, which happens to be their children.

Violence against children happens mainly at home, therefore, the issue should be addressed with the adults. Adults must be taught how to manage their anger, stress, and desires because today's children are tomorrow's parents, and the culture of violence can be perpetuated to further generations.

**"Violence against children is an expression of anger, intolerance and perversion, and an effort to dominate and to obtain obedience."**

He continued reflecting on how as a society we are advancing in terms of science and economy, gaining certain degrees of dominance over these topics. Externally society is managing to conquer their environment; however, internally, people are losing the dominance of their own thinking. There is a current trend in society to move towards temptation and desire.

Br. Chaitanya explained how in the Hindu tradition there are 16 sanskaras or rituals to create an impression in the mind. Out of these 16 sanskaras, two are performed during the mother's pregnancy and eight are performed during early childhood. The idea is to create a positive impression on the child. It also acts as a reminder for the adults to acknowledge that they have something precious to take care of.

The speaker finalized his intervention bringing up some issues present in today's society that need to be challenged. The first is that adults cannot treat children like equals, because then, the adult expects the child to behave like an adult, and when the child fails to do so, a space for violence is opened. He also mentioned the issue of treating children like objects, as it happens in beauty pageants and using children to manipulate other children as it is the case in child-focused advertisements.

## ASH SHEIKH S. H. M. FALEEL

Qs: How does Islam see the upbringing of children and the role of the family, how can religious teachings that justify violence in the upbringing of children be challenged by religious leaders and communities? How can Muslim religious communities nurture a spirituality that promotes inclusiveness, respect, and reconciliation?

The panelist started by explaining that Islam considers children to be of the benevolent blessings of the Almighty Allah. Moreover, it entitles them to a great deal of rights, makes the proper upbringing of them a strict obligation on parents, and emphasizes on their care and special attention.

He continued by presenting eight principles found in the Al Quran and As-Sunnah, as a framework to ensure that children are properly nurtured. (1) Children are God's creations, (2) Allah considers

children to be a gift for the parents, (3) men supplicate Allah to grant them children, (4) killing children, especially girls as in pre-Islamic times, is considered foolish, (5) abortion is prohibited and will only be allowed if it endangers the life or health of the mother, (6) killing women or children in war is prohibited, (7) maintaining and caring for children is the greatest charity (8) treating equally daughters and sons is encouraged.

He elaborated on the idea that good children grow up in a good atmosphere. Every child is born pure.



It is the environment created by his parents that determines his future. The home environment and the parent's upbringing of the child either makes or marks the child's future. Islam emphasizes the need of spiritual, physical, educational and moral upbringing in the best possible manner.

**"Good children grow up in a good atmosphere. Every child is born pure. It is the environment created by his parents that determines his future."**

In the Islamic community, the family institution plays a pivotal role. Islam considers it to be a very significant tool to safeguard and ensure the

wellbeing of children. Islam considers children to be vulnerable and dependent beings. Therefore, Islamic law provides diverse rules for the protection of their body and property.

Among the rights of the child established by Islam, Ash Sheikh S. H. M. Faleel mentioned the right to rituals associated with the birth, breastfeeding, inheritance, being fed, education, right to education, the right to be well provided (materially), helping them to choose good friends and the right to equal treatment

He concluded by saying that when parents fail to fulfill the duties assigned to them towards their children it generally results in a lack of care from children in their old age.

## DR. VINYA ARIYARATNE

**Qs:** As an organization working in the entire country and particularly in areas that were affected by the war, what are the main challenges to address violence against children in the family context in these areas, and what needs to be done to effectively address it?

Dr. Ariyaratne started his intervention by mentioning physical and humiliating punishment, sexual and gender-based violence, children in institutions, child marriage, online safety, emotional well-being and mental health as some of the key issues involving violence against children. He added to the list social and cultural norms, which play a vital role, both positive and

negative, in child well-being, and poverty in the family and in the community as a key factor for violence. He highlighted the absence of commitment from society and the lack of a culture of child protection at government, institutional and community level as vital factors in hindering the eradication of violence in the family, as well as the politicization of relevant institutions. He finalized by mentioning that, although a lot of research and data has been accumulated over the years in Sri Lanka, along with research analysis and scientific evidence, there is little action based on the evidence.

In the last seven years, in partnership with key institutions, the Sarvodaya Movement has been working on different programs on early childhood



education. Their integrated approach is holistic and life-cycle-focused, as well as valued and evidence-based. While maintaining childcare institutions to their best standards, they also initiated a deinstitutionalization program to prevent children from being institutionalized.

**"Now is the time for all of us to work together as organizations that care for the well-being of children."**

Finally, with the support of Arigatou International's Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), they have been working to establish a good practices knowledge base focused on action.

He concluded by encouraging participants to come together to create a new path, building on what each organization already has, and using the

rich resources found in religion and in civil society organizations inspired in spirituality. He stressed that there is enough evidence to start acting, and that the required human, material and financial resources can be mobilized by working together. A call for action was made to the participants to work together as partners for the wellbeing of children.

## THIRD SESSION



### QUESTION FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Can you provide concrete examples of good practices in your communities to help preventing and addressing violence against children in the family context?

Ven. Maha Thero stated that best practices involved being spiritual, mindful and moderating luxuries. He explained that if humans can understand “who I am, here and now”, that is a sound basis of spirituality. The speaker queried whether children can be taught to learn who they are to bridge the gap. In conclusion, a video presentation of Sathi Pasala was presented. For more information, please visit [www.satipasala.org](http://www.satipasala.org)

Rt. Rev. De Chickera summarized examples of good practices: not to treat all religions as being sacrosanct; implement a process of screening with religious leaders working with children; children must be included on decision-making issues; educating children to protect themselves, for instance, with lessons on sexuality.

In response to a question raised by the audience on spirituality, Rev De Chickera stated that it is dangerous to separate spirituality from life. It is

a set of values that make people fully human. Religions are vehicles, the objective or end purpose is that humans realize a fullness of humanity.

Ash Sheikh S. H. M. Faleel answered by explaining that a broken family system is the main reason for violence against children. Strengthening the family structure through spirituality and religious teachings can help eradicating the issue.

All religious leaders must come together with a strategic plan to develop spirituality in children. Today’s materialistic life system is driving families towards violence. He concluded by emphasizing the need for activities that promote spirituality in society.

In regards to the education system, Brahmachari Darshan Chaitanya reflected on how we teach our children to earn a livelihood but queried whether we teach them how to live. Values have

to be introduced early because that is when children form their first impressions. The speaker highlighted the need to develop a system for inculcating these values in children. We need to cultivate a dynamic where children obey and respect their parents and teachers, but at the same

time, where these adults take care and protect the child.

In response to the definition of spirituality, the Brahmachari said it is no different to worldly life. It is not a choice of two lives, spirituality is about how to live, a list of do’s and don’ts.

### QUESTION FOR MR. TIM SUTTON

What is UNICEF doing to address and work on the prevention of violence against children in the family? How do you see the collaboration with religious communities and civil society organizations to take concrete actions?

Mr. Sutton stated that UNICEF has many programs to address the issue of violence against children in the family and institutions. He mentioned communication programs, training of police officers, their work influencing policies, as well as developing guides and conducting research but he recognized that it is not enough. He continued by saying that more spaces for dialogue with partners that translates into action are needed.

Mr. Sutton closed by stressing that the toxic stress that comes along violence inhibits the development of the brain, and the losses from those early years can’t be recovered. This affects us all as a society. Therefore, all actors, including civil society and religious communities, must work in partnership for our collective future.



## QUESTION FOR PROFESSOR SAVITRI GOONESEKERE

What can be done to promote collaboration and action between different stakeholders to address the issue of violence against children in the family context, What is the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and how does it help to address this issue?

She replied by saying that the crucial places for the child to develop are the child's home and school. Since the traditional school system has failed children, the NGO sector and the clergy can take action. Civil society has a very important role to play. In the past, the corporate sector was very instrumental to assist in regards to children's issues. They can be important actors today too.

When the international community adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), there was an enormous momentum. Somewhere along the line, that promise was not realized. The vision of the Global Partnership is to buy into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the human rights framework to use it for the well-being of children.

The core principle of the Global Partnership is to bring UN agencies together and coordinate them, connecting the SDGs, the human rights framework, and the development initiatives to work for the rights of the child. Fostering

interagency relations will help hold governments accountable.

The Global Partnership has three basic values. The first is being child-centered. Children don't think much of their previous generation. There is no intergenerational connectivity. Therefore, we need to focus on children and see what is it that they relate to. This is why their participation is so important.

The second value is gender sensitivity. This is crucial on issues like child marriage, which is a big problem in Sri Lanka. Child marriage in Sri Lanka happens, not because of tradition, but because girls become pregnant after being abused or because of lack of sexual education, and they are forced to get married. All programs must be sensitive to special kinds of issues that affect only one gender.

The third value of the Global Partnership is universality, meaning all rights for all children. The core concepts of what is a child's developmental wellbeing, his protection and his right to have a voice in society are universal.

Responding to a participant's inquiry about issues of sexual violence and its legal response, Prof. Goonesekere said that the failure of the legal system is dominant. Incidents are high due to impunity and gender stigmatization. Women tend to be blamed and men are treated as the victim. She concluded that the only alternative in these situations is to get civil society to monitor the issue and draw attention to it.



## QUESTION FOR DR. HIRANTHI WIJEMANNE

What do you think the government needs to strengthen to accelerate progress in addressing and preventing violence against children in the family context, what needs immediate attention and action?

She answered by stressing that the government has an obligation in regards to violence, as it is ratified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and must be accountable for it. The task is not up to one State institution, but all institutions

at different levels. Currently, violence goes on with impunity. Instead, a zero-tolerance approach is required. The media could play a big role in this respect.

## CALL FOR ACTION AND COLLABORATION: VEN. GALKANDE DHAMMANANDA, AND DR. VINYA ARIYARATNE

Ven. Galkande Dhammananda, Chairman of Walpola Rahula Institute explained how, as an organization, they are working on social healing and reconciliation in Sri Lanka as their main focus, after 30 years of war. The first step is for society itself to accept the fact that it needs to be healed. A traumatized society is a dangerous place for children to grow. Religion can play a very important role in the process of accepting, healing and reaching reconciliation as a society, but religion itself can also be an instrument to legitimize violence against children.

In regards to children, each religion must reflect about their own practices and internal culture, and determine whether they have created spaces that nurture, educate and protect children, or that, on the contrary, violate their rights.

The panelist proposed the creation of an inter-religious network to share experiences. It would also enable communications as equal partners to work on concrete action plans. Dr.

Vinya Ariyaratne followed up by taking the initiative in creating this network and inviting all the participants to help build and join the network. This network can support the national framework to address violence against children together with UN agencies, their rich resources and technical assistance, to have a plan and concrete action on the ground.

He concluded by proposing the creation and publication of an inter-faith practical guide on child protection using examples and teachings of all religions and based on the Sri Lankan experience.



Ven. Galkande Dhammananda, Chairman, Walpola Rahula Institute



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US

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