

---

# INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES: CHILD DIGNITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD



INTERFAITH  
ALLIANCE  
FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

**1<sup>ST</sup> FORUM REPORT**

19-20 November, 2018

---



“ Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that to which we are accustomed. It is essential that we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world. ”

HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN

Founder of the United Arab Emirates

His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan served as President of the United Arab Emirates since the formation of the Federation on 2 December 1971 and as Ruler of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi since 1966. Understanding the UAE is impossible without understanding the life of Sheikh Zayed and his deep religious faith, vision, determination and hard work; his generosity at home and abroad; and the way in which he devoted his life to the service of his people and the creation of a better world. The year 2018 marked 100 years since the birth of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. To commemorate this historic national occasion, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates declared 2018 to be the Year of Zayed. The Year of Zayed featured a series of events and initiatives in the UAE and internationally, designed to commemorate the memory of the late Sheikh Zayed, and showcase his impact and legacy, and promote the values that he displayed throughout his life in creative and interactive ways. The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities was part of these initiatives.



---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Preface	6
II.	Executive summary	8
III.	Interfaith Alliance Formation & Objectives	11
IV.	Interfaith Alliance Overview	13
V.	Interfaith Alliance Workshops	15
VI.	Survey Results & Findings	16
VII.	Interfaith Alliance Forum Key highlights – Day 1	18
VIII.	Interfaith Alliance Forum Key highlights – Day 2	42
IX.	Pledge	49





## 1. PREFACE

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution now in full swing, information and communication technology has proven to be a double-edge sword. Although providing today's world with unparalleled global connectivity and easy access to valuable information on the internet, young children are increasingly at risk of online predators and online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Such a threat requires a concerted effort from a range of partners, including governments, religious leaders, academics and the private sector. With a critical role to play and a crucial responsibility on their hands to ensure young children around the world are, indeed, safe on online platforms, much work needs to be done to make sure the adequate legislation and protection are in place to prevent further harmful acts.

Although countries from around the world are starting to take action for today's children and future generations to come, the digital revolution is advancing at a rapid pace, that is, more than often, gaining ground on such preventative measures.

The United Arab Emirates is leading such efforts in the region, with an expansive range of partners including the Child Dignity Alliance, Arigatou International, The Global Network of Religions for Children, End Violence Against Children, Religions for Peace International, WePROTECT Global Alliance, UNICEF, The Center for Child Protection of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Al Azhar University, World Vision International, Shanti Ashram, International Justice Mission.

The UAE is cooperating and collaborating with nations and organizations around to world to reduce the risks of the online world on its youth through initiatives such as the Interfaith Alliance Forum for Safer Communities.

But a general lack of awareness among communities is still proving detrimental in the fight against child sexual abuse material online, live online child sexual abuse, online grooming and self-generated child abuse material.

Different workshops, however, are paving the way for a brighter future. Held in the UAE, Egypt, the Philippines, Kenya, the Dominican Republic, and India, more opportunities are beginning to surface to engage with hundreds of faith leaders across numerous countries.

And with an impactful series of panel discussions at the Forum based on crucial themes, including the risks to children in the digital age, the impact of abuse on children, the role of policy makers and faith leaders, increasing awareness is slowly, but surely, gaining momentum around the world.

As young children may not be aware of the consequences of engaging in risky or inappropriate behaviours that lead to negative repercussions for others and themselves, it is fundamental we all work together as a global community to help ensure their protection against the risks they face in online privacy, as well as in data collection and usage and the collection of location information. Integrating their rights into policies, developing the necessary measures and processes to handle child sexual abuse material and cases, while creating a safer and age-appropriate online environment, will prove crucial in ensuring that success. Educating children, teachers and parents about the safety of youth and their responsibility towards the safe use of the internet is another paramount step, while getting technological companies on board to be a part of that safeguarding journey.

We have faith in the immense good that can be generated when we all put our hands and heads together towards fighting against a global threat that can, and will, be eradicated in time.



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Running over two days, the forum gathered 450 attendees including senior faith leaders and senior representatives from governments, law enforcement agencies, international organizations, NGOs and industry, and focused on current social challenges and developing comprehensive and practical solutions to protect children from the threats posed online.

The conference was held in partnership with a number of global entities and organizations including the **Child Dignity Alliance, Arigatou International, The Global Network of Religions for Children, End Violence Against Children, Religions for Peace International, WePROTECT Global Alliance, Unicef, The Center for Child Protection of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Al Azhar University, World Vision International, Shanti Ashram and the International Justice Mission.**

The gathered faith leaders expressed their collective interest to address a broader range of challenges and issues that impact the safety and security of their communities. They consulted with the government of the UAE throughout this process, given the country's values of tolerance, peace and co-existence of over 200 nationalities, representing multiple faiths. Through their mutual efforts, the dialogue led to the formation of the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities.

Community and faith groups have an important role to play within society by providing services and support to children as well as their families. They have a duty to ensure that they are able to contribute to keeping children safe in the digital world.

But more pro-active action needs to be taken in that realm. With increasing vulnerabilities facing children around the world today, faith leaders will require all the help they can get in preventing, responding to and ending online child exploitation and abuse. Faith groups hold a key position in helping further the cause.

As such, the UAE has taken it upon itself to lead the way forward and help establish dialogue and affirmative action in tackling the issue. The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities has been a pillar in accelerating efforts towards such initiatives across a number of countries.



THE FORUM  
GATHERED  
**450**  
ATTENDEES



### 3. ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Children and young people represent more than a quarter of the world's three billion internet users. Their generation is harnessing the power of the internet to explore and learn. Despite all its benefits, this exposes them to great risks as well.

Lack of awareness of both children and their parents has empowered sexual predators providing them with a borderless channel for creation, commercialisation and distribution of child abuse material.

Experts have identified four key digital threats that can expose children to online child sexual exploitation and abuse.



People commonly refer to child abuse material as child pornography. However, pornography in the context of adults involves consensual sexual activity.

#### 1. CHILD ABUSE MATERIAL

is by definition, non-consensual. Governments, law enforcement agencies and NGO's are replacing the term 'Child Pornography' with 'Child Abuse Material.'

#### 2. LIVE ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

refers to children being forced to engage in sexual acts which are then live-streamed over the internet. Viewers pay to view the live streaming and in some cases, pay extra to direct the abuse.

#### 3. ONLINE GROOMING

is the befriending and establishing of an emotional connection with a child with the objective of child sexual abuse.

The offender can be someone known to the child, or a stranger. Groomers often adopt false identities to enable them to befriend children.

#### 4. SELF-GENERATED CONTENT

refers to sexually explicit images and videos initially shared for innocent intent which later makes its way to collectors or distributors of child abuse material.

Research findings have shown that 88% of self-generated, sexually explicit content of children was taken from its original location and uploaded to a different site, often without the children themselves being aware. The Internet Watch Foundation reported that a third of child abuse material is self-generated.

The magnitude of online child sexual abuse is enormous and some would say it is a global epidemic.

The child sexual abuse industry is valued at up to \$20 billion per year.

Between 2014 and 2017, The Internet Watch foundation identified over 200,000 child abuse websites. Nearly 100,000 webpages contained images of 7 to 10 year old children. Even more disturbing is that 63% featured infants between the ages of 0 and 2 years of age.



## 4. THE ROLE OF FAITHLEADERS

Faith leaders are uniquely positioned to help develop safer communities, based on the respect and influence they hold in their communities. Followers look to faith leaders for spiritual and emotional support. This allows faith leaders to positively leverage their Influence within communities to promote behavioural change through both words and actions. Religious infrastructure like churches, mosques, temples etc. is present in the smallest villages as well as largest cities, and can be used as channels for communication and change.

84% of the world's population identifies itself with a religion.

*Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life*

74% of people in Africa identify religious leaders as the group in which they have the greatest trust

*BBC - Gallup International Poll survey, 2016*

78% of Indians believe that religion is important to moral life

*IPSOS Global Views on Religion, 2017*

75% of Filipinos consider religion very important

*Social Weather Stations survey, 2017*

## 5. INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OBJECTIVES

The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities (the Alliance) was launched by the government of the United Arab Emirates aims to engage with faith leaders around the world and leveraging their influence to build safer communities. It aims to address issues that impact the safety and security of communities around the world, such as human trafficking, drugs, child abuse, violence, organized crime, radicalization and extremism. The Alliance has three key goals:

- To reach, inform and involve people of faith around the world.
- To create productive dialogue between faith leaders on challenges facing international communities.
- To mobilize global action by faiths and encourage constructive dialogue and partnerships among their communities

## 6. INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OVERVIEW – THE JOURNEY TO ABU DHABI

The birth of the Interfaith Alliance Forum took place in October 2017, following the World Congress on Child Dignity in the Digital World in Rome.

The UAE was also invited to present on Child Dignity Online at the World Internet Conference in China in December 2017, where the Interfaith Alliance forum was also announced to an international audience.

In January 2018, the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Children, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Tolerance held a series of workshops in an aim to start raising awareness among communities and mobilize action.

Later that month, a meeting was held with The Supreme Council for National Security, followed by a further announcement of the Interfaith Alliance Forum at the End Violence Against Children Solutions Summit in February this year.

The challenges facing child protection online was later on discussed with the Chairman and President of the World Economic Forum during a visit in May 2018, and another meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican in Rome.

The Interfaith Alliance Forum's first workshops were held in Egypt on June 4, 2018, followed by a meeting with representatives of the Al-Azhar Mosque in the country. The topic increasingly gained momentum, leading to the first in person meeting of the IFA's Steering Committee in London later that month. The Committee held several teleconferences prior to the London meeting.

The Philippines was targeted next, hosting the second batch of IFA workshops on July 28, 2018, closely followed by workshops in Kenya on August 7, 2018, the Dominican Republic from September 11 to 12, 2018, and finally, the UAE on September 20, 2018.

To ensure all parties, including media, the private sector and the community, remain alert on the issues at hand, the Emirates' Ministry of Interior held a press conference on the IFA on September 24, 2018.

The press conference was moderated by Major Dana Humaid Al-Marzouqi and speakers were Brigadier General Mohammed Humaid bin Dalmuj Al Dhaheri, (Secretary-General of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior), Sheikh Ibrahim Lethome, (Secretary General, Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution in Kenya, Member of the Advisory Board of the Arigato International Organisation,) Professor Hany Farid (Professor of computer science at Dartmouth College, Creator of PhotoDNA and eGlyph)



Father Bishoy Salib (Coptic Orthodox Church). There were also pre-recorded statements from Rabbi Diana Gerson (Associate Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis) and Baroness Joanna Shields (Founder of We PROTECT, Group CEO of Benevolent AI).

Topics ranged from discussing the scale of Child Sexual Abuse and how technology is enabling the growth in this society problem to the current status of actions that have been taken to solve it. The role of religious leaders in communities was discussed and in particular, in relation to preventing child sexual abuse and supporting victims and their families.

“It is a relatively new and complex matter,” said Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila at the opening of the conference. “Unfortunately, some of the main perpetrators of the online sexual exploitation of children are the parents, family members, relatives and close acquaintances or neighbours of the children.”

He explained that the offenders work with each other in a network. “The increasing access to the internet adds a layer of complexity,” he added. “The anonymity of contacts and the lack of knowledge about the lasting impacts of this type of abuse on victims is quite alarming. We need continuing education and enforcement of the laws, coordinated action on the part of local government units, the police, the departments of social welfare, civil society, faith-based groups and families. We also need to work together with the world of media, and those who practice social communication.”

For Baroness Joanna Shields, Founder of WeProtect Global Alliance, the exploitation and abuse of children through digital technologies has become one of the most urgent issues of our time. “It is only through dialogue and collection action that we can address the common challenges we face as humankind,” she said. “And no challenge is more important than protecting the rights and lives of our precious children from harm in the digital world.”

She spoke of child exploitation and abuse online as an unprecedented crime, in terms of its global scale, its devastating impact, its inconceivable humanity and its technological complexity.

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, explained that what is being witnessed today is that a whole generation is growing up online. “Children do not only act online but they think online,” she noted. “The internet is man-made and I am a bit worried of the development of the internet. It has, in a way, gone out of control in that our behaviour and our conduct seems no longer dictated by ethical benchmarks, but by what technology makes possible.”

She went on to explain that technology facilitates – and can even encourage – evil, while concealing the impact on children. “That is the dark side, from invasion of privacy to the production and distribution of child abuse images,” she added. “And let us not forget that behind every image, there is a child being abused. What is really changing is the means which are being employed

to commit these crimes, so we have to revise our strategies”.

Another workshop, as part of the Interfaith Alliance Forum, took place in India a few days later, from September 26 to 27, and increasingly raised the profile and importance of child protection online.

Shortly after, the Centre for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University hosted two festive events, from October 5 to 6, for the Inauguration of the Licentiate in Safeguarding. It launched a two-year master’s degree program in Safeguarding along with a musical performance and children’s choir dedicated to the victims of abuse. Its aim was to showcase its solidarity with those who have suffered from sexual abuse.

At the end of October, a meeting was held with Sheikh Ahmed Altayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Former President of Al-Azhar University, followed by the inaugural event of the Interfaith Alliance Forum: Child Dignity in the Digital World, from November 19 to 20, 2018.

## 7. INTERFAITH ALLIANCE PRE-EVENT WORKSHOPS

In order to support the Interfaith Alliance Forum in Abu Dhabi on November 19 and 20, 2018, a series of pre-event workshops were conducted across different countries. With a special focus on grassroot-level faith leaders, the workshops’ aimed at spreading awareness of online child sexual abuse and exploitation, mobilizing support from faith leaders, and engaging with faith leaders to identify actions that they can and will take as input into the Interfaith Alliance Forum (IFA) in Abu Dhabi.

Six workshops were conducted in Egypt, the Philippines, Kenya, the Dominican Republic, the UAE and India. These workshops have allowed the opportunity to engage with more than 270 faith leaders representing seven major global religions across 30 countries. The workshops were mainly sponsored by the UAE government, and organized in collaboration with local and international partners.

The primary audience of the pre-event workshops were faith leaders of different levels of seniority. Other attendees included representatives from government agencies, international organizations and NGOs, who participated both as speakers and participants. Their experience and knowledge helped enhance the credibility of the messages being conveyed through the workshops to the faith leaders. They also actively engaged with faith leaders on the role that they can play in combatting OCSE. This truly allowed for a more diverse discussion on actions that could be taken by faith leaders while generating improved results through immediate decision-making. Countries Involved:





### Cairo, Egypt

4<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The UAE partnered with Arigatou International and Unicef to launch its first workshop in Egypt, where 60 attendees representing Islam and Orthodox Christianity gathered. The event was such a success that faith leaders invited the UAE to organize a second workshop to further discuss the topic of child protection online, with hopes for more follow-up workshops following the Interfaith Alliance Forum in Abu Dhabi.

### Manila, Philippines

28<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The UAE partnered with the Archbishop of Manila and the International Justice Mission. 25 representatives from Islam and multiple Christian denominations gathered under one roof for the country's first workshop. The UAE was invited to organize a follow-up workshop

### Nairobi, Kenya

7<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Kenya hosted its first workshop on the protection of children online. In partnership with Arigatou International, 43 attendees including Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Indigenous faith leaders gathered from five countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda, to discuss and tackle pressing issues in the field. Panel discussions included child protection policies, the legal protection of children from online abuse and exploitation, as well as response from civil society organizations.

### Santo Domingo, The Dominican Republic

11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018

40 attendees including Catholic, Bahi'i, Anglican, Methodist and Muslim faith leaders from 12 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, including Colombia, Panama, Ecuador and Uruguay, took part in the workshop. The workshop, organized in partnership with Arigatou International, World Vision International and the Global Network of Religions, combined training sessions on the topic of child protection in the digital world. Sessions included experience sharing and good practices, as well as group work to build a document taken as input from the region to the Interfaith Alliance Forum in Abu Dhabi.

### Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

20<sup>th</sup> September 2018

19 participants attended the UAE's workshop on child protection online, including Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist faith leaders.

### New Delhi, India

27<sup>th</sup> September 2018

India hosted around 90 attendees from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar to take part in its first workshop on this topic. The workshop, held in partnership with Arigatou International and Shanti Ashram, focused on understanding the impact of violence against children online, the role of faith communities in the protection of children in the digital world, experiences from the field, and action forward and collaboration. The workshop was held at Raj Ghat, the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi (The Father of the Nation) on the 150<sup>th</sup> year of his birth.





---

## 8. INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FORUM KEY HIGHLIGHTS - 19 NOVEMBER 2018

---

### 8.1. SUMMARY

The first day of the Interfaith Alliance Forum began with an address by Fatima Al-Kaabi, the UAE's youngest inventor, who was representing children from across the world. Her inspiring speech was followed by keynote addresses by Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah (Chairman of the Emirates Fatwa Council), Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (Archbishop of Manila) and Baroness Joanna Shields OBE (Founder of the WeProtect Global Alliance). After a touching performance by Ani Choying Drolma, a Buddhist nun and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador from Nepal, His Highness Sheikh Saif Bin Zayed welcomed attendees to the event.

The day consisted of an impactful series of panel discussions based on crucial themes including the risks to children in the digital age, the impact of abuse on children, what policy makers can do and what faith leaders can do. The ultimate goal of these panel discussions was to increase awareness amongst the audience on online child sexual abuse and exploitation and the actions that can be taken to combat it. Panellists emphasised the vital need for urgent efforts to tackle the issues at hand, which have become all-too-prevalent in today's world. Ground-breaking debates and discussions revolved around finding solutions to a significant problem haunting today's global societies.

The day concluded with a series of workshops where attendees discussed actions that can be taken by faith leaders and faith-based organizations to combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation. Workshop groups were structured around three themes of paramount importance:

- a. Protecting children from online abuse by spreading awareness
- b. Responding to cases of online child abuse
- c. Partnering with other faith leaders, government agencies and NGOs in combatting online child abuse





“Children are innocent and trusting, they need protecting. We hope that religious communities will do this as they often act as mentors.”

Fatima Al Kaabi



“Protecting both children and women’s rights is one of the key cornerstones of all religions.”

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah

## 8.2. SESSION 1: OPENING

### 8.2.1. Voices of children

As Fatima Al Kaabi, the UAE’s youngest inventor at the age of 17, opened the Interfaith Alliance Conference with a touching explanation of how millions of children across the world live in danger, she blamed poverty and war as well as the internet.

Fatima noted that whilst we live in the age of social media and children love being online, the web has a much darker side that can be used by those who, tragically, seek to harm children.

“Children are innocent and trusting, they need protecting,” she explained. We hope that religious communities will do this as they often act as mentors.”

Fatima closed her speech by thanking all the attending delegates for working towards a better future for children across the world.

### 8.2.2. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah’s keynote speech

Given that the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan held the future of children extremely close to his heart, it came as no surprise that Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, the Chairman of the Emirates Fatwa Council, followed the session’s keynote speech of the morning, by underlining the symbolic meaning behind this year’s conference hosting in Abu Dhabi during the centennial year of the birth of Sheikh Zayed.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah said: “I would like to express my appreciation and to thank His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, thank the organisers, and to thank the UAE for hosting this highly important conference.”

He kicked off his speech with the most important element of the forum: children. “We are here to focus on their futures and the future of humanity. Protecting both children and women’s rights is one of the key cornerstones of all religions. In the Muslim faith, Sharia institutions are dedicated to fostering environments for children to not only be protected, but to thrive. However, the concept of schooling peaceful communities for bringing up children is not exclusive to the Muslim faith but a core part of the three Abrahamic religions of the world.”

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah concluded by expressing great enthusiasm for the outcomes that this conference would achieve, and for the results of future conferences to be even more ambitious in nature.





### 8.2.3. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle's keynote speech

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, the Archbishop of Manila, touched on the ways in which religious institutions can work together to prevent abusive behaviours online.

Cardinal Tagle explained, with deep concern, that some of the main perpetrators of sexual abuse are parents, relatives, neighbours, and often close acquaintances of the victims.

“According to a survey commissioned by the International Justice Mission, alarmingly 24% of abuse cases are perpetrated by either parents or relatives. Online sexual exploitation of children in Asia is one of the many faces of poverty. What adds to the complexion of this situation is the ease in which perpetrators can access the internet, as well as a lack of understanding when it comes to the lasting impact that abuse has on its victims. We need continuous education and rigorous law enforcement to remedy this.”

Rounding off his speech, Cardinal Tagle outlined two proposals to help eradicate online abuse. The first call to action was to commission serious philosophical and theological studies from each faith on their respective traditions and how an understanding of these can be used to either remedy or prevent online abuse. The second proposal focused on exploring the relationship between digital life and real life. Throughout his address, Cardinal Tagle was startled by how some parents still allow their child to be sexually abused online, because they believe it is ‘not real life’.

“Some of the main perpetrators of sexual abuse are parents, relatives, neighbours, and often close acquaintances of the victims.”

Cardinal Tagle

### 8.2.4. Baroness Joanna Shields' keynote speech

Baroness Joanna Shields OBE, former UK Minister for Internet Protection and Founder of WePROTECT Global Alliance, addressed the Interfaith Alliance Conference on the source of the issue at hand: the development of the internet, and the dangers posed by it to young people globally. Having been an integral part of leading social media platforms Bebo and Facebook, she shared with the audience the excitement that came from developing these leading pieces of internet infrastructure. However, she also reflected that their use by those looking to harm children was something that unfortunately shocked her and her teams.



“Working together, we can form a powerful movement to tackle the challenges technology creates.”

Baroness Joanna Shields

She revealed a staggering figure that 50 children will be exposed to online sexual abuse in the UK today and every day. Following such revelations, Baroness Shields expressed poignantly that it led her mission today, to develop an international movement dedicated towards fighting the evils that threatened young children online.

She noted that the WeProtect Global Alliance was aimed at ending global child abuse through action, not just words. She was thankful that many of the people and organisations here today had been on the same journey and that they recognised the problem many years ago. Working together, she stressed, can form a powerful movement to tackle the challenges technology creates. “Technology creates a moral void that needs to be filled by a stronger social fabric and that is where religion comes in,” she explained. “We are so focused on the magic of technology, we didn’t stop to ask what happens when kids can ask anything, or see anything online. Every phone is access. We didn’t ask ourselves what would happen if nefarious groups had access to children and could hide behind anonymity. What is happening is an epidemic. Children are the outcome of this big social experiment. Many are self-harming or even committing suicide.”

On a more positive note, Baroness Shields reflected on how religion has always acted as a moral compass, and as such, can act as a leader of the moral discussions of the world. She noted how we now find ourselves in a new world and we must turn towards religious leadership to work together towards a better future for our children. We must give parents the tools to deal with this issue and to know who to turn to for advice. We must protect every child’s smile. Only with light and the strength that comes from God can we face these problems together.



### 8.2.5. Ani Choying Drolma - Buddhist Nun, musician and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador

Ani Choying Drolma from the Nagi Gompa nunnery in Nepal gave two moving vocal performances. These traditional Nepalese songs were sung to a digital backdrop that showed touching images of children.



“The majority of the world’s countries and religions are focused on improving the world. As religious leaders it is your role to spread the spirit of humanity and tolerance.”  
 — Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan



**8.2.6. Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan Delivers Welcome Address**

In his moving opening speech, his Highness Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the United Arab Emirates welcomed attendees to the conference.

His Highness said: “We are here today, following our predecessors to reinforce the messages of tolerance that they shared with us. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan would have approved of this conference, and how it continued his hopes to better the path of humanity. The late Sheikh Zayed learnt directly from the teachings of the prophets, and he shared this wisdom with the current leaders of the United Arab Emirates, and its people. The majority of the world’s countries and religions are focused on improving the world. As religious leaders it is your role to spread the spirit of humanity and tolerance.”

His Highness urged the conference attendees to spread the spirit of brotherhood and commonality throughout the world. His Highness concluded by thanking all the attendees of the conference for their efforts over the coming two days.





### 8.3. SESSION 2: RISKS TO CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

This session aimed to spread fundamental awareness of the dangerous risks faced by children in the digital world, and began with an informative video produced by UNICEF. It told the heartbreaking story of a young girl called Diana who was from El Salvador. At the young age of 14 she started dating a boy and he asked her to send him images of her without her wearing many, and eventually, any clothing. When they split up, he was angry and created a revenge online profile of Diana which showed all of her images. Tragically, he invited all of her friends and family to view the images. He then turned the profile into a public profile, prompting Diana and her parents went to the police. The police said that it was her fault as she had given him the images freely. With great sadness, Diana said she felt abused and the only thing that got her through the ordeal, was the love and support of her family. This was followed by a powerful message from a parent, and concluded with a panel discussion on the topic by a panel of global experts.



**SHE ENCOURAGED MORE ACTION BY THOSE PRESENT TO CHANGE MORE LAWS AROUND THE WORLD.**

#### 8.3.1. Message by a Parent: Address by Sonya Ryan, Founder and CEO of the Carly Ryan Foundation

Sonya Ryan, Founder and CEO of the Carly Ryan Foundation, addressed the Interfaith Alliance, telling her powerful story of the death of her daughter, Carly. Tragically, she was killed by a paedophile who groomed her online over a period of two years and then lured her to a physical meeting and ultimately, her death. With great strength, Sonya said she had a choice: to die herself or fight. To honour her daughter, she created the Carly Ryan Foundation, which acts to promote safety in the virtual world. She emphasised the speed at which the internet moves, in which 400,000 Tweets and 400 hours of content are uploaded to the world-wide-web every minute, and why we must have robust conversations on how we can keep our young people safe in this space.

She focused on the important matter of how young people have to be taught core values related to mindfulness and empathy, alongside education regarding internet safety. She highlighted the vital work her organisation was undertaking to seek the end of online abuse toward children, but emphasised that there had to be a societal change as to how children are supported. She spoke of the paramount action she had taken in her home nation of Australia in order to protect children which had resulted in new online child protection law called Carly's Law. She encouraged more dire action by those present to change more laws around the world. Sonya concluded with an emotional address of how her love for her daughter continued to drive the work of the organisation set up in her name and that she will never stop.

The Interfaith Alliance is indebted to Sonya for sharing her story, despite the great pain she has endured, and would like to thank her for her continue support and insight. Children around the world are safer as a result of Sonya's efforts.





### 8.3.2. Delegates discuss “The Risks to Children in the Digital Age”

The first panel was moderated by Dr. Mustafa Y Ali, the Secretary-General of the Global Network of Religions for Children and Director of Arigatou International – Nairobi. Panellists included Maud de Boer-Buquicchio (UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children), Cornelius Williams (Associate Director and Head of Child Protection at UNICEF), Robbert Van Den Berg (Executive Director of ECPAT International), Jacqueline Beauchere (Chief Online Safety Officer, Microsoft) and Selim J. Edde (Head of Public Policy and Government Relations, MENA – Google).

The panellists introduced their extensive experience covering the technology sector, international organisations and NGOs which focus on the eradication of child abuse online. Jacqueline Beauchere revealed groundbreaking insights from Microsoft’s research into Online Child Abuse, sharing with the conference that a staggering 71% of surveyed internet users had reported being exposed to some form of online abuse, and that an alarming 79% of surveyed teens had reported some level of pain associated with being exposed to online abuse. Selim J. Edde argued that in the wake of such worrying trends, organisations needed to increase digital literacy amongst children and teenagers, and ensure they understood how to mitigate personal risks when online.



71% of surveyed internet users had reported being exposed to some form of online abuse, and that 79% of surveyed teens had reported some level of pain associated with being exposed to online abuse.



Robbert Van Den Berg echoed Edde’s calls for educational literacy, but also argued that a greater level of research was required into both perpetrators and victims of online sexual abuse. Currently, he argued, organisations paint a poor picture of what either a victim or a perpetrator looks like, and whilst there are some shocking statistics which are known, such as 95% of paedophiles online are male, there are many others which organisations and government bodies are still unfortunately unaware of.

Cornelius Williams remarked that it urgently fell to the faith leaders gathered in the room to lead community responses to these issues, and urged religious communities to ensure that they were aware of the risks of online abuse, the channels through which abuse might happen, and the ways that they could help young people to mitigate those harmful risks. Maud de Boer Buquicchio echoed these remarks, stating that young people grow up online and think online. She strongly urged religious communities to ensure that they understood those conversations that are happening online, as it was no longer a valid excuse to argue that if you didn’t understand or use the technology, it was not relevant to you. This was, ultimately, about children, and not technology.





## 8.4. SESSION 3: THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

This session aimed to educate attendees on the destructive harm caused to victims of child sexual abuse through a panel discussion comprising of medical experts on child psychiatry.

### 8.4.1. Panel Discusses the Impact Of Abuse On Children

The panel was moderated by Professor Anantanand Rambachan, Professor of Religion, Philosophy and Asian Studies at St. Olaf's College. Panellists included Professor Ernesto Caffo, Child Psychiatrist and Founder of Il Telefono Azzurro and Professor Gabriel Dy-Liaccog, Associate Professor at Divine Mercy University, USA.

Professor Caffo spoke about the direct health impacts on children who are the victims of online abuse. He revealed that, when impacted by digital and online forms of abuse, the brains of children are placed under huge stress and this creates higher levels of mental health issues. In such cases, this will often lead to a change in that child's behaviour, making them, tragically, depressed or violent. Alongside such changes in behaviour, children can also experience higher levels of cortisol in the blood which has additional negative

side effects.

Professor Gabriel Dy-Liacco, a clinical psychologist, was asked to identify some common traits of the clergy who are, unfortunately, themselves perpetrators of sexual abuse. He shared with the conference his findings from his ongoing research, which revealed that clergy who commit sexual abuse often have very high levels of self-control in most aspects of their lives, such as their commitment to work, but very low levels of self-control in relation to their sexual needs. In such situations, Professor Dy-Liacco informed the conference that certain imposed gradual 'external restrictions' onto the clergy had been effective in curtailing child sex abuse. He argued that this process was effective but it was also ongoing.

Professor Dy-Liacco also revealed research into the long-term psychological impact of children who are abused by members of the clergy. He revealed these victims do not feel as if they matter to whichever transcendent being they believe in, and end up struggling to turn to religion as a source of comfort to help handle the issues they have faced. Professor Dy-Liacco concluded the session by arguing that faith communities critically need to be able to tackle these issues head-on, promoting child-safeguarding measures as a positive extension of all religious missions. Professor Dy-Liacco said that in recent years there has thankfully been a higher level of response from religious groups in their efforts to tackle the abuse of children.

“Clergy who commit sexual abuse often have very high levels of self-control in most aspects of their lives, such as their commitment to work, but very low levels of self-control in relation to their sexual needs.”

Professor Gabriel Dy-Liacco







## 8.5. SESSION 4: WHAT POLICY MAKERS CAN DO

This session aimed to educate attendees on the crucial and much-needed actions being taken by government agencies, international organizations and NGOs. The session opened with an introductory address with a senior representative from the United Nations, and was followed by a panel discussion comprising of senior international experts.

### 8.5.1. Introductory Address



Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, opened the session with an introductory address, stating that the following day was Universal Children’s Day. She said that every 20th of November, we join hands to remind ourselves that all children should be given the opportunity to develop their full potential.

She went on to say that in 1989, the World Wide Web was established. This technological revolution went side by side with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is important that the values and principles of Convention of Rights of the Child remain as relevant

“ We need to invest in making children feel empowered and informed digital citizens, and at the same time help them have solid values. ”  
Marta Santos Pais

informative and influential as ever. Children live in the digital and real world, unconsciously thinking that there are no borders between them. Information and communications technology is important for research, education at school, etc. but many risks might arise from the use of technology as well. All religions and faiths have universal values that protect every child from risk of violence. She explained how the UN conducted a vital study on the violence against children in 2006. The study emphasises the importance of protecting children from risks and ensuring that children get the right information and are able to make the right decisions.

She said her ambition is to build a world where every child can grow up free from harm and violence (including online abuse and exploitation). She felt that Alliances need to start in small places such as the home, schools, communities, etc.

On the subject of homes, she said having a mobile phone is part of one’s life, but if we support parents, they can join hands with children to surf the cyberspace. On the subject of schools, she said we need alliances in schools as we need to empower teachers so they can raise awareness of the dangerous risks of the online world. On the private sector, she said we need to think about how digital literacy tools can be developed, without it being too tactical.

She concluded that we are here today to stress the value of alliances with faith-based organisations. Human dignity of the child unites all of the faith-based organisations.

She said that violence including online abuse is inevitable and posed the million-dollar question: How can we prevent it? She went on to say that in order to make the best use of technology, we need to invest in children and promote solutions informed by their views and experiences on what risk means. We crucially need to invest in making children feel empowered and informed digital citizens, and at the same time help them have solid values. To ensure protecting children from online abuse, we need strong policies that capitalize the role of families and schools, faith-based organisations, the government, etc.

The government has a key responsibility, the enactment and enforcement of clear legislation. We need to be clear on the need to protect child victims. This gives us reassurance that we are moving in right direction. The government needs knowledge and skills that are well placed to investigate and identify perpetrators and victims. We have to ensure that children at risk can seek advice through counselling and support. In addition, children have to have a sense of hope for the future and they need to trust these institutions. When children are victims of abuse, it is sadly the beginning of a new stage, so we need to give them hope and support them in recovery.

She ended by saying that if we join hands, we can achieve zero violence against children by 2030.



### 8.5.2. Panel Discusses What Policy Makers can do

The panel was moderated by Dorothy Rozga, member of the Interfaith Alliance steering committee, and included Julie Inman-Grant (eSafety Commissioner, Australia), His Excellency Kul Chandra Gautam (Former Deputy Exec Director of UNICEF & Assist Secretary General of the United Nations) and Dr. Howard Taylor (Executive Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children).

Ms. Inman-Grant said that technology is always going to outpace policy. She expressed hope in the evolvement of laws, while calling for a need for a holistic approach: prevention of violence through in-house research and evidence-based education. All children get to learn and practice behaviour in order to apply it in real world. She believes we need to empower rather than scare children, hence this is a constructive approach. She acknowledged that the technology industry doesn't want child sexual abuse on its platforms. Positively, there was an 80% reduction of inappropriate content over the last year. Removing images of sexually abused children on the web reduces the children's trauma. However, she highlighted risks that cannot be ignored.

With great tragedy, paedophile sites are being flooded by self-produced child sexual abuse material. Therefore, it is difficult for law enforcement to be able to distinguish between the content produced by perpetrators and that produced by the child. Social manipulation techniques enable perpetrators to hide their identity. Young people exploring their sexuality might share images online and hence be exploited through being threatened to have their images shared with their family, etc. Interfamilial sexual abuse is all-too common.

She closed by saying we have to figure out a way to work together to find new ways to collaborate.

Dr. Howard Taylor said 1 billion children every year experience violence. Online sexual abuse is alarmingly growing. He mentioned staggering figures, such as that one in two children every year experience abuse or neglect. Every faith in its congregation has children who are survivors, currently experiencing abuse, or offenders. Scriptures are pre-digital in all

the religions, but all scriptures are unambiguous regarding the safety, sanctity, and security of the children.

He was asked: What gives you hope?

He replied that this is a moment of great historical opportunity. In a global alliance 3 years ago, 193 heads of governments gathered in New York and agreed on universal goals to end all forms of child abuse in 2030, change in attitude and growing intolerance of certain behaviours. Faith leaders and communities involved in this agenda can accelerate the process of child protection.

He was also asked: What can faith leaders do and how they can interact with secular policy makers?

He argued that faith leaders have a unique place of trust and an unparalleled reach. Together, trust and reach are powerful in raising awareness about the issue. There are always solutions. Faith leaders can use this trust to raise awareness and advocate for policy makers in their countries. They can mobilise their congregations and should advocate locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Faith leaders should also look for opportunities to partner (ex. the global partnership is a member-based partnership of 320 members from 23 governments). They can engage, and get access to expertise, resources, etc.)

His Excellency Kul Chandra Guatam said we all have common aspirations: Children should grow and live a long prosperous life.

He felt that although we come from different angles we unfortunately don't always work as closely as we can, when it comes to children and their wellbeing there's no difference in our views. Neither governments nor religious associations can do it alone. Ultimately, we need everybody. Today the organisation with the greatest credibility is UNICEF. We need moral teaching and overall guidance and we need this kind of leadership from religious leaders.

He closed with a remarkable suggestion of having a Fatwa against sexual exploitation.

He had many recommendations for policy makers and key legislators:

He felt that forcing a strong partnership between religious and secular leaders is critical for success. Religious leaders should influence parents and communities. Many people get religious guidance from their local


In a global alliance 3 years ago, 193 heads of governments gathered in New York and agreed on universal goals to end all forms of child abuse in 2030.



priest instead of scholars. However, local priests might not always know the implications of religious scriptures. Eg. Child marriage, honour killing, etc. These scriptures might be misinterpreted. Priests condone these acts but might not be correct.

He had an important request to senior religious leaders: That they convey the right messages to local priests.

An example he gave was in the 1980's, when Haiti's catholic church was complicit with the dictatorship. The Cardinal posed one important question to his religious leaders: what do you think is the role of the church in our community? Their answer was that it is the duty of the church in the community to focus on religious teaching. However, when he asked the community, the local people said that the role of the church is to help empower and fight against poverty and oppression. The Cardinal made a vital call to all of his priests to follow what the people said. We can learn from ordinary people. Let us learn from children.



**TRUST AND REACH ARE POWERFUL IN RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE ISSUE.**



## 8.6. SESSION 5: WHAT FAITH COMMUNITIES CAN DO

### 8.6.1. Panel discussion: What Faith Communities Can Do To Stop Online Abuse

The final panel session of the day was chaired by Rebeca Rios Kohn, the Director of Arigatou International New York Office, and the conference heard from Father Hans Zollner SJ (President of the Centre for Child Protection, Pontifical Gregorian University Rome), Garth Blake (Chair, Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission), Dr. Brinder Singh Mahon OBE (CEO and Director of The Nishkam School Trust), Rabbi Diana Gerson (Associate Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis), Reverend Hidehito Okochi (Chief Priest, Kenuin and Jukoin, Director, Arigatou International), Dr. Kezevino Aram (Director Shanti Ashram) and Marya AlHattali (General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, UAE).

Dr. Kezevino Aram spoke first, arguing that a conviction of religious faith called individuals to move towards action, and this was particularly relevant on issues related to the online abuse of children. She argued that in order to protect and safeguard children today, interfaith dialogue of the type

which was found today in Abu Dhabi was critical, and urged the conference to continue to work in continued interreligious forums to tackle these significant issues.

Mr. Garth Blake followed, as he reflected on the challenges that the global group of forty worldwide churches of the Anglican Communion faced in tackling the important issue of child abuse. Mr Blake presented the guidelines which the Anglican Communion had ordained to promote safeguarding and also touched on the importance of discussing the Theology of a Safe Church, as this can truly underpin the importance of the prevention of child-abuse, both online and offline.

Father Hans Zollner SJ explained three important projects that are currently being undertaken at the Centre for Child Protection of the Gregorian University in Rome. One of them entails bringing all sorts of people, from academics, religious leaders and law-enforcement, to NGOs and technology companies, together to talk about getting ahead of the wave, which is the threat of online abuse of all kinds for children and vulnerable people.

He mentioned a specific experience that stayed with him whereby, from that moment onwards, there was a strong appeal to all kinds of peoples, companies and those responsible, that “we do whatever is within our reach for young people to be safe in today’s online world.” He recollected that it was moment when he thought that “when we all stick together, we can make that difference that really prevents children from being exploited but only if we come together.”

He called on a need to focus and to combine forces, which brought about seven working groups in different sectors.

The second area he touched on was education and training, and more specifically, blended learning, by reaching out to faith communities and academic institutions offering a programme of e-learning units addressing all those important issues when dealing with abuse and its prevention. “It is not only an online course but it is online units combined with face-to-face sessions, mostly in academic institutions,” he argued. “It will make a difference in the future, and we have have residential training in Rome in English, which is a multidisciplinary approach.”

He called on the urgent need to bring together what has been learnt from sociology, psychiatry, law, spirituality, and other fields, to understand the depth of the trauma and wounds, and the measures for healing to better understand where where to head in safeguarding from here onwards. Father Zollner SJ also mentioned the first Masters course in safeguarding – a two-year full time academic degree programme that brings in the interdisciplinary approach.

The final project he discussed was the area of research. “When you talk about safeguarding, everybody wants to improve children’s situations but

scientifically, until this day, we don’t know what really works better,” he expressed, as he spoke about setting up an intercontinental intercultural research project to better identify the most effective safeguarding measures online and offline so that young people are safe. “It is desperately needed,” he concluded.

For his part, Reverend Hidehito then addressed the conference on the importance of listening to children who are victims of abuse, and not disregarding their experiences and stories of abuse to ensure they are fully taken into consideration. As people of faith, Reverend Hidehito argued, humanity must truly have faith in children, their stories and their views. Additionally, he argued, faith groups need to ensure that the houses of worship can act as safe havens for all.

“**Humanity must have faith in children, their stories and their views.**”  
Reverend Hidehito

Marya AlHattali then shared her perspectives on the abuse of children, explaining that her viewpoints came not only from being professionally engaged within this forum, but also from the important point of being a mother. This element of family, for her, was a critical one, as it motivates her to work to prevent abuse of children.

Dr. Singh Mahon, who is the director of the British Nishkam School Trust and oversees the overall management of the education of 4,000 children in the UK, highlighted the dire need to provide moral guidance and digital literacy for children that seeks to work against darker and more pervasive forces that can influence them online. In that context, he argued, it is equally important to be able to address children in a positive language that shows them they are more widely valued by the adult world.

Rabbi Diana Gerson finally reflected that children are now digital natives, and using computers for them is an organic process. She argued that it is important that congregations are addressed on and reminded of the tenets of child-protective protocols, and are able to guide their congregations forward accordingly.





## 8.7 WORKSHOPS AT EVENT

Attendees of the Interfaith Alliance Conference convened several workshops to discuss techniques and methods on how best to prevent, respond and partner to combat online sexual abuse and exploitation (OCSE), as some faith leaders had different levels of understanding on the issue.

### 8.7.1 Workshop Explores How To PREVENT Online Sex Abuse

#### Recommendations Drafted On How The Interfaith Alliance Conference Can Create Action



Two workshops examined how the Interfaith Alliance could turn words into action following this year's conference. The workshops, which were titled 'Prevent', looked to understand how religious communities can seek to prevent online child abuse, and sought to tackle two central concerns: what individuals can achieve back in their home communities and their religious congregations; and secondly, what these workshops could recommend to the Interfaith Alliance Conference following the conclusion of the event.

The workshops held a variety of discussions, focused on how religious leaders have to make their congregations aware of the dangers of online child abuse, and also teaching children the values and the technological foresight for them to recognise malevolent behaviour online, and tackle its pervasive effects. This point was reemphasised frequently, that children needed to be educated on how to prevent online abuse through specific techniques and mechanisms. However most importantly of all, the participants argued about the need to empower authorities to locate and remove harmful content from online forums early on.

They concluded by saying that as individuals we can always do more, such as ensuring that all faith groups continue to cooperate all year round, not just when convention dictates.

### 8.7.2 How Should Faith Communities RESPOND To Online Abuse?

Final Workshops on Day One Of Interfaith Alliance Focuses On Protecting Children From Online Sexual Exploitation



In reality, the issue of child abuse and exploitation through online means is not a main topic of discussion among the faith communities. The aim of the workshops were to build knowledge and raise awareness on the issue of OCSE, provide guidance on how to respond to the issue, including practical actions faith leaders can take, and finally how to raise strength in numbers by partnering with different stakeholders.

Participants of the workshops also highlighted the fact that communication was a large factor in preventing and responding to abuse. Creating a safe environment for children to speak about fears, potential abuse and difficult situations they may have faced was crucial to the success of combating OCSE.

At the beginning of the session, a booklet was distributed in welcome packs which explored how to protect children from online sexual exploitation, a useful document for faith leaders to take home and share with their respective communities. A toolkit is also being developed which will act as a guide based on the results assimilated from the workshop itself.

**The aim of the workshops were to build knowledge and raise awareness on the issue of OCSE, provide guidance on how to respond to the issue.**

### 8.7.3 How Should Faith Communities PARTNER To Combat Online Abuse?

The aim of this workshop was to explore ways in which Faith Communities could partner with each other and with other organisations to tackle the issue of online child abuse.

It was agreed that this is a cause that transcends specific religious beliefs and is an issue that challenges humanity and every local community.

The workshop explored the idea of establishing an IFA local / regional committee comprising local faith leaders from all religions. This 'sub-committee could meet on a regular (monthly / quarterly) basis to share activity plans, statistics, knowledge and learnings. This could also be an online network that works on a local level. Faith leaders could have their own login and access to the latest information.

It was agreed that all messages regarding the issue of online child abuse and ethics should be consistent. If we speak with one voice, it has more chance of being heard. These messages could be shared directly to the community during religious services and / or through local marketing material such as leaflets.



It was also agreed that partnering with local schools on this issue would be something that could be actioned quite easily and will also be very effective. Many faiths have affiliations with specific schools at a community level and relationships are already established. Local faith leaders could meet with school governors or heads to discuss the importance of the subject and their willingness to play an active role in assembly or lessons.

The group also discussed how partnering with local NGOs to ensure a flow of information both ways would be beneficial. Unicef was highlighted as an international partner but it was agreed that there are many more, smaller local organisations that are trying to tackle the same problem. If all of those organisations could work together, rather than compete, it would have a greater impact.





## INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FORUM KEY HIGHLIGHTS - 20 NOVEMBER 2018

The second day of the event, 'Call to Action' consisted of three panels of senior faith leaders making statements affirming their intent to combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation. The panels were based on the three key themes of the event (Prevent, Respond and Partner)

### 8.8. Faith leaders discuss ways to prevent child sex abuse

The first panel of the day featured Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Hindu Spiritual leader), His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel (Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of France), The Right Reverend Bishop Julio Murray (Anglican Archbishop of Central America) and H.E. Ambassador Dr. Yusuf Abdulrahman Nzibo (Chairman, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims).



Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, also known as Amma, emphasised that childhood is a time of joy and innocence, and that the sexual abuse of children is like tearing open a flower bud. She added that sexual abuse can happen at home, work, or any other place, hence people constantly feel afraid that their privacy gets invaded.

Unfortunately, very bad consequences arise from child sexual abuse. These include severe depression, psychological trauma, difficulty in studying, and being unable to live an independent life.

Amma said that the famous three monkey emoji's are commonly used on social media. The first with his eyes covered, the second with his ears covered, while the third with his mouth covered. These should symbolise 'see no-evil', 'hear no-evil', and 'speak no-evil'. We should also have a new monkey emoji with his mobile covered. This doesn't mean that technology is bad, but we have to use it with care in order to avoid fateful consequences.

The world is becoming ever more fast-paced. Mothers should give more time to their children. They should constantly ask their children: Who did you play with? Who did you talk to? Children should feel free to open up to their mothers and tell them everything.

Amma proposed a question: If our laws and enforcement agencies are effective, then why is sexual exploitation increasing at such an alarming rate?

People have to have self-control and see divinity within everyone, as we are all God's creations. Moreover, compassion is the core principal of spirituality. Compassion is inherent within every individual and it makes us respect human beings.



His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel added that technology has its pros and cons. There are very positive changes; however, we face a darker side as well. The most vulnerable members in society are being harmed by technology. More than half of the population uses the internet, and more than a quarter of internet users are children, which causes computer addiction. In addition to that, anonymity in the digital space lowers self-control and increases violence.



There is an urgent need to take concrete steps and actions to eradicate the crime of child exploitation which so badly damages the bodies and souls of children. Religions don't have ready-made solutions, but they have fundamental moral and spiritual values that can be preserved in their tradition. Religions can contribute to deep understanding of human rights underscoring the concept of freedom.

We need to express solidarity with those who are exploited, and pledge to care for those marginalised in society. Our inspiration is the belief that this world is a sacred gift from our creator.

Following on from Metropolitan Emmanuel's speech, H.E Ambassador Dr. Yusuf Abdulrahman Nzibo acknowledged the need to reclaim and protect the dignity of the child. He added that it is important to understand the breakdown of family and community values.

As religious leaders, we need to accept that the dignity of the child needs to be protected. We need to talk openly not just in congregations, but with families etc.

It is important to empower families in order to understand the dangers that their children are being exposed to in the digital world. As religious leaders, we need to mobilise ourselves through faith dialogue and share knowledge in order to influence positive legislation and protect the dignity of a child.

By the end of the action plan, The Right Reverend Bishop Julio Murray listed some observations on child sex abuse. He started by saying that we live in a cyber culture, so as leaders in faith communities, we need to know and manage the dynamics of the digital world and know its risks and challenges. He added that the younger generations are facing a problem, which is loneliness, which makes them more susceptible to cyber bullying and grooming.

Families should take more time to listen to their children. Parents don't only need to tell their children about values. Instead, they need to show them what values look like.

As religious leaders, we call on you to participate in the construction of relations on behalf of the marginalised children who fall victim to sexual abuse.

## 8.9. Faith leaders discuss how to respond to online child sexual abuse

Faith leaders have a crucial role to play in tackling and responding to online child sexual abuse. For years, and more recently, society has turned to faith leaders as a moral compass to end this crime. With technologies increasingly impacting the way children interact with the world today, religious leaders are believed to be in a unique position to take action when offenders ask for help, and to provide families with the necessary advice and the tools they require to protect their children. Being able to exert great influence on their worshippers, leaders of faith are considered the largest and most inter-connected social organisations in the world – with most of the world's population, around five billion people, belonging to religious communities. This gives them the enormous potential to truly spearhead the fight against such a crime.

The second panel discussion of the second day featured Reverend Mitsuo Miyake (Chief Senior Minister, Konko Church of Izu and Director of Arigatou International), Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (Chair of the Emirates Fatwa Council), His Holiness Shri Shri Sugunendra Theertha Swamiji (Abbot and the Head of Sri Puthige Matha), His Grace Francisco Montecillo Padilla (Apostolic Nuncio to the UAE and Apostolic Delegate to the Arabian Peninsula), H.E.

Sayyed Ali El Amine (Muslim Council of Elders) and His Beatitude Sebastian Camacho (Archbishop of the Old Catholic Church, Latin America).



The session focused on the actions which faith communities are able to take in order to tackle the impact of digital technology on young people, and ensure that children are not abused online. The session leaders highlighted the role of parents and families play to ensure that technology was used safely and appropriately, for, as Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah said, "parents are the first to have the prerogative in choosing the child's upbringing". There was a consensus amongst the speakers that whilst we are living in a digital and information age in which technology plays a central factor, educating both children and parents on the sensible and informed use of technology is vital.







His Grace Francisco Montecillo Padilla, part of the official Vatican delegation to the event, further emphasised to the conference the importance of education, both in the home but also through implementing formal schooling in curriculums that educate children on how to use online technology ethically. Reverend Mitsuo Miyake made it clear that when forming such policies to overcome child abuse, we must take into account the voices of children and listen to their feedback to develop a system that worked for them. His Beatitude Sebastian Camacho closed the session reflecting on the power of interfaith communities when they are together to be able to change the world around them, and hoped that the assembled gathering here would lead to such changes regarding online sexual abuse of children.

### 8.10. Faith leaders discuss ways to partner to overcome the online abuse of children

The final session of the morning focused on the development of partnerships: partnerships between religious groups, partnerships between stakeholders, and partnerships that can overcome the online abuse of children. The panel comprised of Ani Choying Drolma (Buddhist Nun and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador), Bani Dugal (Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations), Dr Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi (Chief Imam of the All India Imams Organisation) and Rabbi Joseph Potasnik (Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis).

The conference first heard from Ani Choying Drolma, who spoke powerfully from her own personal experience, and stated that in order to help solve the issues regarding sexual exploitation of children online, we must ensure that we surround children with love, compassion and kindness as this will nurture them and allow them to grow.

The session then heard from Bani Dugal, who underlined the role of religion in helping to work against and tackle materialistic conceptions of the world, from which, she explained, symptoms of online child abuse occur. For her, religious groups of whatever faith had



to assume a position of moral leadership that highlighted the need for a fuller form of living which fostered the mental health of all of society. She concluded by stating her confidence of religious groups to undertake this task, and to engage local communities in such an endeavour for all.

Dr Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi then addressed the conference and stated that faiths from across the world had to work together to educate groups on the evils of child online sexual exploitation. Dr. Ilyasi spoke powerfully of the absence of family mechanisms to be able to solve such issues, and stated that he looked toward the intervention of religion to be able to quell such problems. He argued that it was only through an approach which embraced interfaith as its direction forward that we might be able to have a resolution to such issues.



The final speaker of the session was Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, who stated that the moral duty for all faiths was to do as much as possible to tackle online abuse, and ensure that no child was exposed to such evils. He emphasised that not one faith had an answer to these issues, and so it was only through working together that we might be able to protect children from these evils. He stated that this has to be a priority for all working in this field, and emphasised that the problems of each child was a challenge which each faith had to assume, to understand and to help to overcome.



### 8.11. The final session of the 2018 Abu Dhabi Interfaith Alliance at Wahat Al Karama

The final session of the 2018 Abu Dhabi Interfaith Alliance was held in front of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in the picturesque setting of Wahat Al Karama. The ceremony was graced with the presence of His Excellency Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the UAE. Before the gathered faith leaders addressed the conference, guests had the pleasure of listening to the VOENA children's choir as the sun set in Abu Dhabi on Universal Children's Day.

The session was addressed by a range of senior faith leaders, including Prof. Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb (Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the President of the Muslim Council of Elders), Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Hindu Spiritual Leader), His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel (Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of France), Rabbi Michael Schudrich (Chief Rabbi of Poland) Bhai Sahib Bhai Dr. Mohinder Singh, OBE KSG (Chairman of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha) and the Reverend Keishi Miyamoto (Leader of Myochikai).

The session was first addressed by Hindu Spiritual leader, Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi Devi. Her Holiness, in addressing the gathered assembly, argued that faith communities have a responsibility to victims of online child sexual abuse to teach values related to sexual conduct, and through religious and moral leadership, cultivate a better example for the world to follow.

Reverend Keishi Miyamoto then addressed the conference, and highlighted the overarching role which religion plays in the formation of the moral fabric of society, and noted that in spite of the growth of science and technology,

and their continued usefulness in our daily lives, these do not provide the ethical leadership required that enables us to answer complex questions which we face as human beings. He underlined the role which religions of all creeds play in coming to solve the issue of online child exploitation, and looked forward to the conference offering solutions for a better world.

Bhai Sahib Bhai Dr. Mohinder Singh discussed the role religion had to play in shaping the values and qualities of all of humans, and how through religious work within communities, faiths have the ability to shape social perceptions and change lives. He argued that this directly applied to online child abuse through the education of adults in regards to online sexual abuse. He stated that religions impart values of virtue and offer immense wisdom, and through the respect and use of those, interfaith groups could come together to end child sexual abuse.



Rabbi Michael Schudrich noted the dangers and opportunities of the internet by comparing it with the Jewish religious ceremony of Havdalah, which is held at the end of Shabbat, when a candle is lit ahead of the upcoming week. Fire, Rabbi Schudrich told the conference, is both a highly creative and an immensely destructive force, and so the candle of Havdalah represents such a duality for the upcoming week. In a similar fashion, he argued, the internet also possesses these qualities of light and darkness, and faith communities not only have to recognise that in their interactions with the internet, but also have to inform others regarding such dangers.

His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel highlighted that the problems of online sexual exploitation of children are ones which have to be tackled through working with families. He noted that religious communities across the world are in unique positions to be able to help and educate families on spotting the signs of danger, and in helping their children to overcome these issues. He concluded by expressing his anticipation of the outcomes of the conference in being able to tackle this issue.



The final session of the conference was addressed by Prof. Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, who commented on Islam's legacy of caring for and protecting the rights of children. He noted events from the life of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), and from examples of Sharia Law, of how children are nurtured and cared for. He concluded the 2018 Interfaith Alliance Conference by thanking all the attendees, the organisers, and His Excellency Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan for his patronage of the event.



“Religious communities across the world are in unique positions to be able to help and educate families on spotting the signs of danger, and in helping their children to overcome these issues.”  
His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel

Every human being was born with the right to live a dignified life and prosper in a safe community. Protection of children's dignity is pivotal to the progress of their community and the world we live in.

## 9. PLEDGE: WE CAME UNITED BY FAITH WE HOPE, BLESSED BY FAITH, WE ACT, REINFORCED BY FAITH TO CREATE SAFER COMMUNITIES

### The Abu Dhabi Declaration

Every human being was born with the right to live a dignified life and prosper in a safe community. Protection of children's dignity is pivotal to the progress of their community and the world we live in. Their generation is harnessing the power of these technologies, as children represent today more than a quarter of the world's three billion internet users. Yet millions of them are being harmed in this new digital world, since technology innovations have also become a source of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

To solve this unprecedented problem, we must inform and involve all stakeholders, including people of faith. We believe that protecting the dignity of children is a cause that will unify and mobilize people across countries, cultures and faiths. Today, we have the opportunity, awareness, wisdom, innovation and technology to achieve this human and moral imperative.

It is with a firm belief in the inherent dignity of every child that we, leaders of the world's major faiths and participants at the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities: Child Dignity in the Digital World, convened in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on 19-20 November 2018, do solemnly commit that we will:

1. Unite as faith leaders and join with people of all faiths to prevent harm to children and to promote children's physical, social, psychological and spiritual development;
2. Advocate for a universal truth that no form of progress or advancement progress or advancement can justify any form of harm to children;
3. Foster dialogue in places of worship worldwide on the role of community faith leaders in supporting the dignity and protection of children specially in the digital world;
4. Form and engage effectively in partnerships with leaders of every faith to address the religious implications of online child abuse and exploitation;
5. Work to inspire spiritual and practical action and education by all faiths within their own religious leadership at all levels on how to respond to cases of child abuse and to support victims and their families.





The Pledge, Wahat Al Karama  
Abu Dhabi, UAE  
20<sup>th</sup> November 2018



---

# INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES: CHILD DIGNITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD



INTERFAITH  
ALLIANCE  
FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

**1<sup>ST</sup> FORUM REPORT**

19-20 November, 2018

---