**AWARD TO BE PRESENTED AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI PUTS A SPOTLIGHT ON CHILDREN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

LOCATION, DATE The **Wear My Shoes Award**, sponsored by [Arigatou International](https://arigatouinternational.org/) and the [Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities](https://iafsc.org/), is putting the spotlight on grassroots efforts and the remarkable actions co-led by children and adults to mitigate the global learning crisis. The Award is part of the **Wear My Shoes Campaign of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021**, an annual event initiated by Arigatou International to engage diverse faith communities to raise the status of children’s rights on the 20th of November, the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Together with UNICEF, some 18 faith-based organizations (including the World Council of Churches, World Vision, Religions for Peace and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists), joined forces this year to draw global attention to the urgency of getting children back to school. The aim is to mobilize children and adults - including religious leaders, policymakers, parents/caregivers, and educators - to take immediate action for students’ return to school and to prioritize the grave impact of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Thanks to a donation by the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, US $5,000 will be given to each of the five winners of the Wear My Shoes Award. The Award will be presented on November 19th at an event hosted by Arigatou International and Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities. The event will be held at EXPO 2020 Dubai, where five winners will be selected for their outstanding practices carried out during the global pandemic in 2020-21. The winning practices will have focused on the most vulnerable and excluded children who were hit hard by the pandemic without access to learning and will have addressed their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Increasingly, child-focused organizations working to improve the lives of children are involving them in decisions affecting their lives. Their participation and engagement also help to empower other children to claim their rights and to ensure that their best interests are at the heart of policymaking including COVID-19 responses.

The Wear My Shoes Award event falls within the *Week of Tolerance and Inclusivity* at EXPO 2020 Dubai which was launched to foster greater common understanding to create more tolerant societies under the theme “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future”, which aligns closely with the objectives of the Wear My Shoes Awards.

Children who are among the most affected group by the COVID-19 pandemic are emerging around the world as key agents of change by taking concerted action to help improve the lives of their peers. Innovative child-led activities are taking place in many countries in response to the unprecedented crisis with school closures leaving millions of children without access to learning. With the support of their faith communities, in countries like Bhutan, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan and Serbia, for example, children are helping by enthusiastically responding to the alarming number of children out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children’s voices are being heard and their message to adults is loud and clear – make children’s right to education a higher priority.

**As of the end of October 2021, UNESCO warned that nearly 800 million students around the world were still affected by full or partial school closures**. UNESCO further warns that [school closures](https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures) during the past two academic years have resulted in learning losses and increased drop-out rates, impacting millions of children, particularly the most vulnerable students. Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Violence against Children, has recently expressed concern stating that “school closures contributed to increased anxiety and isolation among children, along with sadness, frustration, stress, disruptive behavior, hyperactivity, and sleeping and eating disorders”.

Join the online event on 19 Nov. at 8:30 AM EST by registering here:

<https://arigatou-worlddaylive.layoutindex.net/en/front-register>

Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D.

Director, Arigatou International New York

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**About Arigatou International**

Arigatou International is an international, non-profit organization committed to building a better world for children. Arigatou International is “All for Children,” and draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to come together to address children’s issues.

An initiator and sustainer of partnership-based initiatives to secure child rights and foster children's well-being, Arigatou International seeks to maximize the potential of interfaith cooperation, and always strives to empower and involve children and youth.

Holding special consultative status with UN-ECOSOC and consultative status with UNICEF, Arigatou International liaises and works jointly with UN agencies and other NGOs to foster cooperation within a rights-based approach to the profound issues faced by children and youth today. In 2008, Arigatou International and its Global Network of Religions for Children, in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF, launched Learning to Live Together – An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education.

For more information, visit <https://arigatouinternational.org/>

**About the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities**

The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities was established to empower faith leaders to work for the safety and security of our communities, tackling issues such as child sexual abuse, extremism and radicalization and human trafficking. We aim to facilitate the building of bridges between faiths, NGOs and experts in various domains. We are conscious of the importance of empowering faith leaders, both at the institutional and grass-root levels, with knowledge and to mobilize them to play an active role in community safety. Our current themes are 'Child Dignity in the Digital World' and 'Hate Crimes'.

For more information, visit <https://iafsc.org/>

**Media Enquiries**

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