

## **Ethics Education for Children as GNRC Initiatives in Six Major World Regions**

Since the First Forum of the GNRC in 2000, GNRC members have organized workshops and conferences to work out concrete action plans as well as establish regional networks in six major world regions. Various initiatives and actions have been taken at regional, national and local levels in order to respond to the specific situation that children are facing in each region. The work in each region is being coordinated by six [GNRC Coordinators](#) at the level of each region, some of whom are supported by sub-regional and/or national GNRC contact persons. Not only adults but also children are important actors in moving ahead with the initiatives in each region. Here is a brief overview of GNRC activities in six world regions over the past five years:

### **GNRC South Asia**

In February 2001, the first GNRC regional workshop was organized by the [Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement](#) of Sri Lanka under the theme of “Children at Risk from Poverty and Other Deprivations” and the GNRC South Asia, consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, was established. Following the Workshop, various intra-country and inter-country activities were initiated by the participating individuals and organizations with the regional GNRC Secretariat, located at Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka.

In India, the first and second Policy Consultations on the Challenges to the Human Rights of the Child and the Response of People of Faith were held in December 2000 and May 2001. An India interest group was formed, which contributed to GNRC advocacy, for example, the review of the outcome document of the UN Special Session for Children.

With children constituting a third of the total population of Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya has facilitated children’s participation in the peace process in Sri Lanka. The Zones of Peace (CZOP) project was set up to promote and protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict in Sri Lanka. A workshop was organized in April 2003 to discuss the various aspects of peace building and to provide an opportunity for children to prioritize issues that in their view are most important for any future peace negotiations.

One example of a regional, capacity-building program organized by Sarvodaya was a four-month training programme for the Care Society of Maldives, a GNRC South Asia member, which needed to improve its capacity in working with children with disabilities.

In follow-up to the Second Forum of the GNRC, the GNRC South Asia Conference was held in Sri Lanka in November 2004 to review the regional activities and discuss actions plans among the GNRC contact persons in each country.

## **GNRC Africa**

The East and Southern African Network of Religions for Children (ESANRC) was launched in June 2001 at the GNRC Conference in Tanzania, which brought together 49 religious leaders from 15 countries of East and Southern Africa. The conference focused on the issue of *education for peace* in order to respond to the situation whereby between 1990 and 2000 alone, two million children were killed, over one million orphaned, six million seriously injured and permanently disabled and 12 million rendered homeless by violent conflicts.

The GNRC Education for Peace pilot project was launched in Tanzania in 2003. The vision of the Education for Peace project is to build a peaceful country which respects human differences and celebrates the diversity therein while giving visibility, continuity and strength to the peace heritage in rural and urban areas of Tanzania.

Five workshops have been held in various regions in Tanzania from July 2003 to June 2004, which provided a forum for "teaching and learning about the values, attitudes and forms of behavior that reflect respect for life for human beings and their dignity." "Peace" and "Breach of Peace" were conceptualized and many concrete actions to disseminate peace education were proposed by children.

Following up on the workshops, 34 Peace Clubs have been established at the initiative of children mainly in formal and informal learning institutions in order to promote peace in their respective schools and communities. Another Peace Club was also set up by street children on the streets in Dar Es Salaam. Peace Club leaders participated in the march for peace in Dar Es Salaam during the International Day of Peace organized by UNICEF in September 2004. They also initiated a drama with the theme of peace-building, in which children played the parts.

The ESANRC developed into GNRC Africa in 2004, and now covers all the countries on the continent. In addition to education for peace, GNRC Africa joined efforts to address HIV/AIDS by participating in an inter-faith gathering that sought to refocus on efficient and effective ways of ameliorating the HIV/AIDS scourge.

## **GNRC Central Asia and the Caucasus**

In the last decade, the nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus have received less attention from the international community than those in many other regions, though children there are faced by political and social changes sweeping countries in transition from decades of being part of the Soviet Union. Several initiatives have been taken in the process leading up to establishing a GNRC network in this region.

After preliminary contacts with local groups, the first GNRC meeting, called the Baku Dialogue, was held in June 2001 in Azerbaijan, bringing together more than

50 people of faith, scholars, NGO representatives, and children from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic, Georgia and Russia who shared a concern for children, to discuss the potential for the GNRC to do constructive work in the region. In November 2003, a second Baku Dialogue meeting was held with the strong support of Dr. Suleymanova, Azerbaijan's Commissioner for Human Rights and of Government Minister Rafiq Aliyev to continue to discuss common concerns for children.

The Bishkek Dialogue for Children was held in August 2003 in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, bringing together 19 participants from 15 faith-based community organizations, as well as representatives of UNICEF and UNESCO. The participants agreed to work together to develop a Bishkek group, and a Kyrgyz country network committed to the rights and happiness of all Kyrgyz children.

In January 2004, preliminary contact initiatives began in Uzbekistan and Armenia. In May 2004, further meetings were initiated by the GNRC as part of its "Yerevan Dialogue for the Children of Armenia."

### **GNRC Initiatives in the Middle East**

At the First Forum, people of many religious traditions from around the world shared a spirit of common concern for children regardless of nationality, religion and ideology. Among them were Christians, Jews and Muslims from various places in the Middle East. Sadly, soon after the First Forum, the situation in parts of the Middle East took a further turn for the worse. Nevertheless, several GNRC initiatives have been taken by various GNRC members for the children in the region.

In Lebanon, the René Moawad Foundation of Lebanon held four GNRC training workshops on the Convention on the Rights of the Child from February 2002 to July 2003, bringing together participants from Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. These workshops have not only enhanced awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child among people of faith, but also among representatives of NGOs working with children, educators, and young people themselves. The most recent workshop was a week-long event exclusively for young people.

In Jordan, the Ecumenical Studies Center held a consultative seminar on "The Spiritual and Ethical Values as Basic Principles of Child Education and Development," in April 2003 bringing together 61 participants, including children, from various faiths from Lebanon, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan was the guest of honor at this seminar, a significant mark of distinction for the GNRC.

In Israel, Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam held a GNRC Conference on "Religion, Social Identity and Education among Arabs and Jews in Israel," with one hundred

participants representing Christianity, the Druze, Islam and Judaism in February 2004.

Following the Second Forum of the GNRC in 2004, the GNRC Arab Countries and the GNRC Core Group in Jerusalem were established respectively to explore possible actions under the current situation for the future of the children in the region.

### **GNRC Europe**

In August 2002, the first major GNRC conference in Europe was held in Lisbon, Portugal, bringing together 47 people of faith, both adults and children, coming from different religions — including Buddhism, Christianity (Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Baha'i, and Vedantique — and from different European countries to share experiences about their involvement with children. The participants agreed to continue to work as GNRC Europe.

In the follow up to the conference, a Core Group meeting took place in Geneva in April 2003 and put forth proposals for an action plan. Among the proposed steps are the organization of a Workshop on Ethical and Spiritual Education for Children and the formation of a European GNRC Working Group on Ethical and Spiritual Education for Children.

Because of its strong multi-faith character, members of the GNRC Europe have focused on sharing information and reflections within their own constituencies and with other organizations and religions in their own contexts. Steps have been taken to organize national meetings in several countries. Information about the GNRC has been disseminated in many international forums organized by organizations in Europe. One example was the World Council of Churches Consultation on the Dignity of Children in India in 2004 where many participants showed keen interest in dialogue and collaboration with the GNRC.

At the Second Forum of the GNRC in 2004, GNRC Europe confirmed its focus on ethical and spiritual education for children, and three workshops for this agenda are planned for 2005.

### **GNRC Latin America and Caribbean**

In December 2002 the first GNRC Latin American Conference took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, bringing together 118 people, including children, from 22 Spanish-speaking countries in the region and Brazil. The themes adopted were poverty and violence, as these are the main problems facing children in the region, with basic quality education for all and ethics education as responses to these problems from an inter-religious network in the region. Two declarations — one from the children and one from the adults — were issued and three committees were formed: one on education, one on ethics education, and one coordinating

committee with representation for the three sub-regions: Andean, South Cone and Mezo America.

After the conference, various local initiatives have been undertaken by GNRC members. In Panama, members celebrated the Day of the Child by reading the Buenos Aires Declarations in various churches, they also held their fourth gathering of churches under the theme of Slavery and Children's Rights, with a focus on the girl child. In Ecuador, through IUNA (United Churches for Children's Rights), members have started to lobby the National Congress for more attention to ethics education.

Another outcome of the conference in Buenos Aires is a sub-regional project entitled "Preventing and Overcoming Urban Juvenile Violence in Central America," which began with an intervention in Honduras. In April 2004 a workshop and a meeting were held in Tegucigalpa to address urban juvenile violence, taking Honduras as a case study and discussed the plans of the GNRC in the sub-region, bringing together 52 participants from 11 countries in the sub-region and beyond. Encouraged by the workshop, participants from El Salvador organized a meeting to establish GNRC El Salvador and to develop actions to prevent violence in El Salvador in January 2005.

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has been the main religious force in the region, but in the last half century the presence of other Christian denominations has been growing, with tensions that some observers say have the potential to evolve into major unrest among Latin Americans. The GNRC has achieved excellent cooperation among different Christian churches and denominations as well as with other religions with a much smaller presence in the region.