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## **World Religious Leaders and UN Agencies to Launch A Worldwide Initiative Promoting Ethics Education**

TOKYO/GENEVA, September 7, 2007 — Religious leaders from around the world and top UN officials will launch a worldwide initiative promoting ethics education in May 2008 at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in Hiroshima, Japan. The Forum will bring together hundreds of leaders from the world's major religious traditions, educators, business executives and media personalities, as well as senior officials and experts from UNICEF, UNESCO, and other UN agencies to help strengthen the UN-led commitment to securing the rights and protection of children around the world.

The centerpiece of the initiative is a set of tools for youth leaders and teachers around the world, employing a new interfaith learning process to empower children and young people to develop a strong sense of ethics. It is designed to help the young to better understand and respect people from other cultures and religions and nurture a sense of global community. The kit provides tools for educators to develop innovative and critical thinking in their students, to nurture non-violent behaviors and to empower children to become agents of social change. Through workshops involving students from different religious and cultural backgrounds wherever possible, the new ethics program seeks to help youth to empathize with others, encouraging greater individual and collective responsibility and fostering a spirit of reconciliation. It provides a vehicle for youth to encounter and examine values with their peers from different religious, cultural, and social backgrounds, and to apply what they learn to the real challenges of their daily lives. The teaching "toolkit" has been field-tested in a variety of settings around the world.

To help the teachers and students further and support the ethics initiative, an international panel of experts appointed by UNICEF and the GNRC has been conducting a joint study on how the child is portrayed in religious scriptures and is cared for, ministered to, and treated in religious communities. The results of the study will be released at the Third Forum, with the stated goal of translating into global reality the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### ***Ethics education program already having an impact***

#### **ISRAEL**

In a July 2007 GNRC program inspired by the ethics education initiative, a group of 22 Muslim, Christian, and Jewish youth made a six-day journey to historical sites in Israel/Palestine with symbolic relevance to the conflict in their region. At each stop, they discussed their own values and their differing perceptions of their shared history in the land. They summed up the experience in these words:

*"We engaged in a deep learning experience together—getting to know more about one another's history, culture and beliefs while strengthening our own identities and forming stronger and more grounded understandings. We dealt with difficult and challenging issues without fracturing the relationships within the group and without resorting to hurtful arguments and break-downs. It may have been just a small step in breaking down the deeply entrenched walls of isolation between the different national and religious groups in our country, but it was an important and successful one. In the current climate of despair, small steps such as these are both rare and precious, and we should all feel proud and privileged to have taken part."*



## **INDIA**

Kalpana, 15, a girl from New Delhi who attended a week-long ethics education workshop in India, had this to say:

*"I knew about respecting others when I came here, but now I have begun to learn what it means in reality, and what it takes when meeting with young Hindus, Muslims and Christians to do things together for our communities."*

## **AFRICA**

Mohammed, 16, from Kenya took what he learned from an ethics education workshop home and formed a Peace Club in Northern Kenya. He has brought together youth in his village to plan non-violent responses to the various challenges the village faces, mobilizing a visible youth movement to make changes for peace.

## **LATIN AMERICA**

In the volatile border region shared by Colombia and Ecuador, an ethics education workshop was held for teachers, parents, and children. Using case studies, role plays and discussion, the participants mapped out conflict issues, explored non-violent alternatives, and made personal commitments to building peace. Maria Lucia Uribe, one of the Colombian facilitators, commented on the impact of the workshop:

*"The effects of the violent conflict in Colombia are unfortunately ingrained in the behaviors and attitudes of some of the children directly affected by the situation. It can make them resentful and intolerant of others. I was glad to see displaced children from Colombia living in Ecuador sharing their experiences, sharing their fears, and themselves proposing ways to be more respectful toward others, to accept differences and to respond in a non-violent way even when their rights are violated. They discovered that they can be part of the solution and not part of the problem."*

### ***Supporters of the ethics education initiative***

Ethics education has been a key concern for the GNRC since it was established in May 2000. On the occasion of the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002, the GNRC founder, President Takeyasu Miyamoto of Japan's Arigatou Foundation, called in his speech to the General Assembly for the establishment of the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children. The Council soon became a reality, with a Geneva-based secretariat and members drawn from the GNRC network, academia, UNICEF and UNESCO, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Vatican, the World Jewish Congress, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). The Council's board brings together eminent figures including HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, theologian Professor Hans Kung, Tanzanian statesman Salim Salim and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Kul Gautam.

### ***About the GNRC, and its Third Forum in May 2008 in Hiroshima***

Since its founding, the GNRC has emerged as the only global interfaith network exclusively dedicated to securing the rights and well-being of children and young people everywhere. Its membership is made up of religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and grassroots community workers from 82 countries on six continents, and it represents all the world's major religions as well as many other spiritual traditions. It works at local, national, regional, and global levels, often in partnership with UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs, the media, governments and the business community. In all facets of the GNRC's work, children and young people are active participants alongside adults. GNRC members share the belief that people of faith ought to shoulder greater responsibility in the task of creating a better environment for children through stronger ethics education, and that this endeavor is



ultimately the most effective route to the realization of a peaceful world where all can live in dignity.

Every four years, the GNRC convenes a global forum with participants coming from the world's principal religious traditions. Important GNRC partners such as UNICEF and UNESCO are always represented at senior levels. Each forum provides an occasion for GNRC members to evaluate progress, share best practices, and chart new courses of action.

The Third Forum follows the first held in Tokyo in 2000 and the second in Geneva in 2004. Its main theme will be:

**LEARNING TO SHARE**  
**Values, Action, Hope**

In addition to launching the ethics education program and the results of the GNRC-UNICEF study "Children in World Religions," the Forum will present the results of the regional GNRC programs underway in Africa, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and South Asia. Participants will tackle child-relevant issues in the following thematic areas:

- The Ethical Imperative to End Violence against Children
- The Ethical Imperative to Ensure that No Child Lives in Poverty
- The Ethical Imperative to Protect the Earth

For more information on the GNRC and the ethics education initiative, visit:  
[www.gnrc.net](http://www.gnrc.net) & [www.ethicseducationforchildren.org](http://www.ethicseducationforchildren.org)

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