



Brief Overview of the National Consultations

In April and May, *Religions for Peace* national chapters also known as Interreligious Council in other regions, held national consultations in 5 countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A total of approximately 170 religious leaders, including women of faith and youth, participated in these consultations. Among the religions represented in these consultations were Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Muslims and Sikhs.

Discussions were held on the current situation of child rights and wellbeing within their respective country and identifying opportunities, gaps and recommendations for sustained faith engagement and collaborations. This entailed interactive sessions on what are the key challenges, what and who are addressing them, what is further needed for effective response, etc.

Some of the key areas that were identified and discussed were related to the following (am just going to through a quick laundry list of issues that the participants highlighted needing to be addressed) –

- Child marriage
- Access to education particularly for girls (within this also a need to discuss subjects that are normally not touched upon such as menstrual hygiene and early pregnancy that prevent many girls from going to school). Also highlighted was the need to have value-based education
- Violence, abuse and exploitation, including corporal punishment, child trafficking and forced labour
- There was also the mention of Low birth registration
- Responsible parenting
- Healthcare
- Nutrition
- Need to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable such as children with special needs, transgender children, children in jail or born in jail
- Poverty as the root causes to many of the challenges faced by children
- Climate change and conflict as detrimental factors
- Need to harmonize age of child in various laws
- Lack of child protection related laws or weak enforcement where they exist
- Child related laws not complying with international standards or not conforming to the criteria set by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Negative and positive role of media

- There was also a mention of extremism amongst children and that most of the suicide bombers were either children or adolescents and thus the need to address this

There were few other issues that were highlighted as being exacerbated by the pandemic. One in particular was singled out and that was online schooling. The digital divide was clearly seen and many children from the poor and rural family dropped out of school. However, increase use of internet for those who have it also resulted in online exploitation of children. The lockdown also saw an increase in violence at home and mental health issues. Another area that was discussed was the access, and affordability of vaccines as well as the need to counter misinformation, disinformation, misunderstanding and suspicion regarding the efficacy of vaccination.

Recommendations

- Creating, strengthening and sustaining safe and protected environment for children.
- Building the capacity of faith leaders and equipping them with resources to enable them to tackle the issues identifies
- Enhancing the engagement of women of faith and youth
- Raising awareness among the families and communities on the issues and what can be done
- Advocating for policy change, and enforcement of laws
- Strengthening social and transitional media presence to highlight the issue, successes, lessons learned, etc.
- Fostering robust cooperation, coordination, collaboration among and between various entities. Basically enhancing multi-religious and multi-sectoral partnership, including with government and media