

**Launch the new World Vision campaign
'It takes a World to End Violence against Children'
June 13, Geneva, Restaurant Vieux Bois, 12 - 14:30
Closing remarks by Prof Isabel Apawo Phiri,
Deputy General Secretary World Council of Churches**

I would like to thank the World Vision International for bringing us all together today at this important launch event for “It takes Geneva to End Violence against Children”.

After hearing the testimonies of young people and responses by leaders of key organizations and representatives of Missions in Geneva it becomes clear that together we can achieve much in preventing and addressing violence against children. Therefore SDG 17 is key to today’s event.

Let me take this opportunity to share with you what the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of more than half a billion Protestant and Orthodox Christians in one hundred and twenty countries, is doing to contribute towards ending violence against children motivated by our faith in God.

First, Churches’ Commitments to Children project, an initiative developed in partnership with UNICEF to strengthen the efforts of church communities to protect children was established in 2015. Through this project, which fulfils SDGs 16.2, and 13.2, the WCC is experiencing readiness among its members in preventing and addressing violence against children. Based on a collaborative effort including 235 experts from our churches and many of your organizations, we were able to launch the book, “Churches’ Commitments to Children project” in March this year. Many churches are supporting refugee children, helping former child soldiers to return to recover from trauma, preventing child labour and in many places churches are helping children who suffer from domestic violence. We have mapped and analyzed strong examples in which we see how collaboration among all of us makes a difference in children’s lives.

Out of the 348 WCC member churches, 180 churches already confirmed their readiness for mutual support around the urgent efforts to end violence against children between March and June this year. We expect many more to join by the end of this year. World Vision is also helping us to build their capacity.

The action plan includes:

- Support to positive parenting to prevent violence against children at home and promoting non-violent discipline
- Help ending harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation/cutting and early ‘marriage’ (which in essence should NOT be called marriage but violence against children)
- Advocacy for toll-free helplines for children to be available in every country

This project also helps churches to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about the situation of children in their countries as an alternative report to the one submitted by their governments.

Second, the WCC Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (WCC-EHAIA) and the Churches' Commitments to Children projects have taught us that all children need to be informed where they can find safe spaces and confidential support if they are faced with violence. The WCC believes that we need to create safe spaces to improve communication among children, young adults and adults in order to prevent violence against children. The WCC-EHAIA has used such spaces to engage in genuine dialogue to solve together causes of HIV, including among children. They fulfil SDG goal 3.

Third, the Just Community of Women and Men project has introduced the Thursdays in Black campaign for solidarity and advocacy against all forms of sexual and gender based violence, a significant symbolic action to resist violence against children. They fulfil SDG goal 5.

Fourth, we also have to realize that violence is not always physical, psychological or sexual. Depriving children from access to basic amenities for a quality life, such as water and food is another form of violence. Everyday globally more than 525,000 children under five die of diarrhea caused by consuming contaminated water. SDGs goals 6 and 2.

Fifth, when countries have laws that make it difficult for children to be registered and therefore end up being stateless, that is another form of violence against children. SDGs 5 and 16.

What we have demonstrated today is that by all working together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals we can stop these tragic realities, address the root causes of violence against children and support victims of violence to recover from trauma.

Together, let us turn the Sustainable Development Goals into reality and create systems in which no violence against children is tolerated.

Thank you.