

# **Coventry Charter for Children and Non-violence**



**Churches' Network for Non-violence • CNNV**

# INTRODUCTION

This charter is for religious groups and organisations who want to work with others to eliminate violence against children and address the recommendations in the United Nations Secretary General's Global Study on Violence Against Children.

The Study is the first global, human rights based study on violence against children. Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro the Independent Expert leading the Study said:

“The challenge for the Study and States is to seek to move societies on from attitudes which tolerate and approve any form or level of violence against children and to assert the status of children as individuals with the same right to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity as the rest of us.”

The naming of the Coventry Charter for Children and Non-violence is inspired by the vision of Coventry Cathedral as a world centre for pilgrimage and spiritual renewal and as a focus for international reconciliation; it is a place of nurture for communities and a beacon for peace and non-violence.

*The Coventry Charter promotes the child as a person with rights and inherent human dignity.*

Violence that is within the law, as in the legal right of parents to use “reasonable” force in disciplining children, is viewed as violating children's right to equal protection under the law, as well as their physical, spiritual and emotional integrity. This view is grounded in the sacred respect that religious communities hold for every child.

*Universal regard for children transcends religious and theological differences.*

It impels religious groups to join with other communities, groups and organisations in rejecting all forms of violence and humiliating treatment of children. All expressions of violence against children are viewed as a violation of a child's physical, spiritual and emotional integrity. Working in solidarity with others and putting into action shared values of compassion, love, non-violence and justice, sustains the well-being of children everywhere. Eliminating violence against children is a key towards a more peaceful society.

*The Coventry Charter promotes and supports the full breadth of children's human rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

Many governments are signatories to the Convention and some religious communities, groups and organisations have adopted the Convention as a basis for working.

*The Convention was described by Nelson Mandela in 2000 as “That luminous living document that enshrines the rights of every child without exception to a life of dignity and self-fulfilment”.*

Action towards ending violence against children requires religious communities to ensure that all sacred texts are used to promote non-violence and not to condone or recommend violence, punishment and humiliation of children in the name of religion. Contemporary study, theological reflection and teaching can help pave the way towards eliminating violence and transforming the lives of children. Religious communities working with children have the capacity to work with others to develop high quality resources and tools to inform and support people in taking action towards eliminating all forms of violence against children. All religious groups should support parents in positive, non-violent parenting which leads to mutual respect, self-discipline and loving relationships between parents and children.

The Coventry Charter acknowledges the strength and influence of religious communities to create awareness about the effects of violence against children, to learn from others and work in solidarity towards preventing and ending all forms of violence against children.

Religious groups have the moral standing to be advocates for children and to work with communities and governments to pass legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment. Ending violence against children requires legal prohibition as well as education.

The Report of the Global Study on Violence Against Children urges States to implement the Report recommendations without delay. The Report recommends that legal prohibition of violence against children together with reliable national data-collection systems, should be achieved by 2009 (Report of the United Nations Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Children 2006 para 116).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a “child” as every human being below the age of eighteen years” (article 1).

# COVENTRY CHARTER FOR CHILDREN AND NON-VIOLENCE

## **1. All children are entitled to equal respect for their inherent human dignity.**

Working actively towards a culture of respect for all children is a key towards ending violence against children. We will, in cooperation with others foster respect for all children.

## **2. All children are entitled to grow up in family and all other settings free from corporal punishment and all other forms of violence and humiliating treatment.**

Children are entitled to more not less protection from violence than adults, including protection from physical, spiritual, emotional, verbal, sexual, psychological and gender-based violence. We will use every opportunity to work with others to create awareness about the negative effects of violence against children. Preventing violence against children and urging governments to pass legislation to end legalised violence against children, including corporal punishment, will be a priority.

## **3. All children have the right to speak out and be listened to.**

The knowledge, ideas, gifts, competence, life experiences and perspectives of children should be respected, encouraged and listened to in both family and community life. We will demonstrate full respect and regard for the dignity of children by facilitating children's participation and involvement in issues of concern to them.

## **4. All adults have the responsibility to enable children to feel safe enough to speak out when they feel hurt or threatened.**

All adults who are in contact with children should have an understanding of the needs of children and of different stages of child development. Adults should be aware of the best ways of creating an environment where children feel safe to express themselves. Adults should also develop skills for communicating with children at different life stages. Our training will promote these actions.

## **5. All children are entitled to positive, non-violent relationships with the adults who care for them.**

In our work and contact with children we will strive to build relationships between adults and children which are positive and life-enhancing. Adults can teach children by their own example and demonstrate ways of resolving conflict without the use of hitting or any other form of violence, however supposedly 'reasonable'. Adults are the protectors, guides and supporters of children and as such responsible for their quality of life.



**6. The protection of children from violence is the responsibility of the whole community.**

Children should be active equal participants with adults in solving problems of violence in community whether it is adult to child, child to child or adult to adult violence. We will encourage children to use their capacity to make a positive contribution in keeping with their age and development.

**7. All children are entitled to learn about their Convention (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) in a way that is appropriate to their age and development.**

We will use every opportunity to support initiatives to enable children to become fully conversant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to raise adults' awareness and understanding of the Convention.

**8. All children are entitled to the highest standard of care and protection from those who work with them.**

All adults working with children in our religious communities will receive high standards of training, support, resources and clear lines of accountability for working with children. Adults are responsible for creating networks for the prevention of violence against children.

**9. Children who have endured any form of violence are entitled to emotional, physical, spiritual and psychological support from people qualified to help them.**

Our religious communities will, whenever possible, work with qualified people to bring support, compassion, spiritual help and healing to children who have endured forms of violence.

**10. All children are entitled to learn non-violent ways to resolve conflict.**

We commit ourselves to providing positive guidance in resolving conflict that leads to compassion, justice and fairness and respect for the human rights of others.

*We commit ourselves to addressing violence against children in all its forms and settings and resolve to work with others towards eliminating violence against children.*

Signed:

Date:

CONT...

## Useful Websites

### **Churches' Network for Non-Violence (CNNV)**

*Supports the aim of the Children Are Unbeatable Alliance to give children the same protection from physical punishment in the home as other family members.*

*CNNV aims to work ecumenically to form a network of support, information and practical resources to assist religious groups to campaign for equal rights for children and to promote positive, non-violent parenting.*

[www.churchesfornon-violence.org](http://www.churchesfornon-violence.org)  
[info@churchesfornon-violence.org](mailto:info@churchesfornon-violence.org)

### **Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance**

*Campaigns for the UK to satisfy human rights obligations by modernising the law on assault to afford children the same protection as adults.*

[www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk](http://www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk)

### **CRIN - Child Rights Information Network**

*Up-to-date information on children's rights and the global study on violence against children.*

[www.crin.org/violence](http://www.crin.org/violence)

### **Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children**

*Was launched in 2001 to speed the end of corporal punishment of children across the world.*

[www.endallcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endallcorporalpunishment.org)

### **The Global Study Website**

[www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org)

### **Website for the UN Global Study on Violence Against Children**

[www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org)

### **Building a Europe for and with Children**

[www.coe.int/children](http://www.coe.int/children)

## Children's Charities

### **Barnardos**

[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

### **The Children's Society**

[www.the-childrens-society.org.uk](http://www.the-childrens-society.org.uk)

### **NCH**

[www.org.uk](http://www.org.uk)

### **NSPCC**

(Free) Tel: 0808 800 5000

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

### **Save the Children**

Tel: 0207 012 6400

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

### **Childline**

(Free) National helpline for children and young people in distress.

Tel: 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### **Parentline Plus**

*This is national charity working with parents offering information and support for the issues facing parents.*

(Free) Tel: 0808 800 2222

[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

## **Signatures and date.**

### *Acknowledgement*

*We express sincere thanks to all our colleagues and ecumenical partners for their advice and contributions towards the development of this Charter.  
Churches' Network for Non-violence (CNNV) 2006*

“*No violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable. Yet the in-depth study on violence against children confirms that such violence exists in every country of the world, cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin. In every region, in contradiction to human rights obligations and children’s developmental needs, violence against children is socially approved, and is frequently legal and State-authorised.*

*The study should mark a turning point – an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as ‘tradition’ or disguised as ‘discipline’.*”

**Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, United Nations Global Study on Violence Against Children 2006.**



**Churches Network for Non-Violence CNNV**