

# Faith-based support for prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment of children – a global overview

Prepared by the Churches' Network for Non-violence ([churchesfornon-violence.org](http://churchesfornon-violence.org))  
May 2015

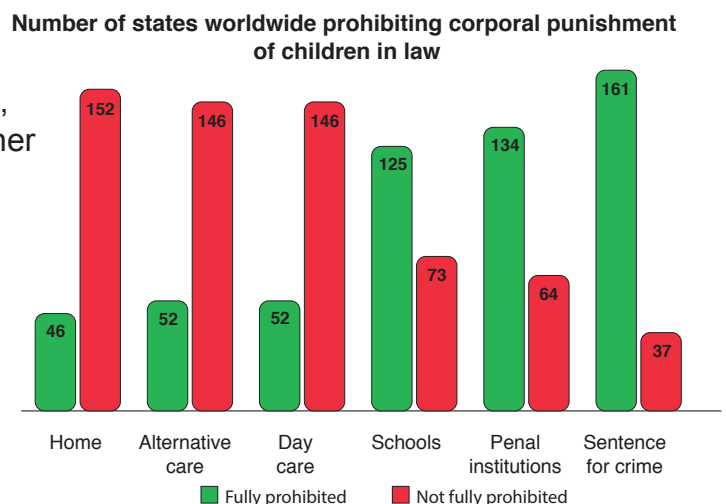
## The importance of faith-based support for prohibition of corporal punishment

Faith-based support is an integral part of the global movement for prohibition of all corporal punishment of children. Growing numbers of religious communities and organisations regard ending legalised violence against children as both a moral and a religious imperative. For many communities this involves changing an often deeply entrenched culture of acceptance of physical punishment and challenging those who use their sacred texts and teachings to justify it.

Universal and religious values of compassion, justice, equality and non-violence transcend theological and denominational differences and form a basis for multi-religious cooperation towards eliminating violence against children. There are also many examples of religious communities working in solidarity with secular organisations, bound by a shared respect for human dignity and a strong commitment to human rights. This briefing provides examples of faith-based support across the world. We welcome information from all faith communities on actions taken to support prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment of children: email [info@churchesfornon-violence.org](mailto:info@churchesfornon-violence.org).

### *Worldwide progress towards prohibition of all corporal punishment of children*

- 46 states have reformed their laws to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, including the home; governments in a further 47 states are committed to doing so
- in 130 states, corporal punishment is prohibited in one or more settings outside the home
- in 22 states, corporal punishment is not fully prohibited in any setting



*"Progress towards abolishing corporal punishment is being made, but millions of the world's children still suffer from humiliating acts of violence and these violations of their rights as human beings can have serious lifelong effects. Violence begets violence and we shall reap a whirlwind. Children can be disciplined without violence that instils fear and misery.... If we really want a peaceful and compassionate world, we need to build communities of trust where children are respected, where home and school are safe places to be and where discipline is taught by example."*

(Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, 2006)

# Multi-religious support for prohibition of corporal punishment

## **Kyoto Declaration**

The Kyoto Declaration – *A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children* – was developed in response to the UN Study on Violence against Children at a consultation of religious leaders of all faiths in Toledo, Spain, in 2006. The Declaration was endorsed in the same year at the 8th World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Kyoto, Japan.

*“We call upon our governments to adopt legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, and to ensure the full rights of children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional agreements. We urge them to establish appropriate mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and to ensure that religious communities participate fully in these mechanisms. Our religious communities are ready to serve as monitors of implementation, making use of national and international bodies to maintain accountability.”*

(Kyoto Declaration (2006), Article 6)

## **Declaration on the Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Confronting Corporal Punishment of Children**

In 2011, 100 influential leaders from various faiths met at a conference in Qom, Iran, supported by UNICEF in collaboration with the Iranian Judiciary and Centre for Human Rights Studies at Mofid University, Qom. A key outcome was a declaration which commits the religious leaders to address corporal punishment.

*“We invite: (1) All religious leaders and their followers to make efforts, based on religious teachings, to: Utilise their capabilities to build the culture of respecting children’s dignity and the principle of the best interests of the child, and to confront violence against children, particularly violence in the form of corporal punishment in the home and educational settings ...”*

(Declaration on the Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Confronting Corporal Punishment of Children, para. 1)

## **Religious support for the Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth, Canada**

The statement was developed by a national coalition of organisations facilitated by the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario. It summarises the developmental outcomes associated with physical punishment and concludes that it plays no useful role in the upbringing of children; rather it poses a risk to their development. The statement has been endorsed by religious organisations of a number of faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Quakers and Islam.

*“Children in Canada must be given the same protection from physical assault as that given to Canadian adults and to children in a growing number of countries. Our children’s rights to physical integrity and dignity must be recognised in our law.”*

(Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth, CHEO, Canada)

# Specific faith-based support for prohibition

## Baha'i Faith

*"The relationship within the family should reflect what is regarded as the norm for relationships in the Baha'i community which is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank, loving consultation ... each person in the family must be respected as an individual and must be given both the love and the space to develop and grow.... Violence towards, vilification or humiliation of husband, wife or children is not an acceptable part of family life. Abdu'l-Baha disapproved of the corporal punishment of children."* (Dr Moojan Momen, Iran, The Family in Baha'i Faith)

## Buddhism

Buddhism is concerned with the welfare of all human beings. The many schools of Buddhism all spring from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama and reject the infliction of pain and harm on others. Non-violence is an essential tenet of Buddhism and Sigâlovâda Sutta makes the point that if everyone develops compassion, mutual respect, courtesy and loving kindness children will not be ill-treated. This Sutta has been described as the "Buddhist code of discipline". The Buddha's advice to parents is clearly to support children to become generous, compassionate and responsible.

## Christianity

There is increasing Christian support for prohibition at national and regional levels. For example, in New Zealand, South Africa and the UK, Christian leaders have actively supported law reform to prohibit all corporal punishment, including in the home. In the USA, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church have adopted policies supporting the prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment in childrearing and education. In the Caribbean in 2012, Christian leaders from Aruba, the Cayman Islands, Guyana and Jamaica issued a joint statement supporting law reform to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, emphasising that physical punishment is incompatible with core religious values, and stating that attempting to justify corporal punishment with reference to religious texts is inappropriate (see box on page 5).

Christians believe all human beings are created in the likeness and image of God, and they look to the example of Jesus to live their lives. Jesus always treated the vulnerable with love and compassion. The way of Jesus was non-violence. Reading the Bible through the lens of Jesus' teachings provides a guide for Christians' lives and relationships with others.

All the recorded encounters between Jesus and children were kind, gentle and respectful. Children were central to the new order Jesus initiated. By blessing and laying his hands on children, Jesus received children as people in their own right; he gave them status, respect and dignity (Mark 10:16).

*"There is nothing in the Catechism of the Catholic Church which supports the right of parents to use corporal punishment."*

(Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2013)

*"I do not believe the teachings of the Catholic Church as we interpret them in 2011 condone corporal punishment. It's hard for me to imagine in any way, shape or form, Jesus using a paddle. [Social research] is very clear: violence fosters violence."*

(Archbishop Gregory Aymond, Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2011)

## Hinduism

*"There is no greater good than a child. Children are entrusted to their parents to be loved, guided and protected.... Beating, spanking, pinching, slapping children and inflicting upon their astral bodies the vibration of angry words are all sinfully destructive to their spiritual unfoldment and their future."* (Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, "Spare the Rod and Save the Child")

## Islam

A growing number of Muslim leaders have spoken out about the misuse of Islamic texts which appear to promote violence. Eminent Muslims have argued that the Quran teaches tolerance and moderation and that there is no instance in the Quran of Muhammad striking a child. Respected scholars and leaders highlight in their teaching the strong requirement in Islam to show love and mercy towards children and to preserve their human dignity. The Cairo Declaration on the Convention (CRC) and Islamic Jurisprudence, adopted in 2009, calls for prohibition of corporal punishment in member states of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation.

*“Participants to the Conference recommend that OIC Member States prohibit all corporal punishment and other cruel and degrading forms of punishment or treatment of children, in all settings including within schools and within the family, linking law reform with the promotion of positive, non-violent forms of discipline.”*

(Cairo Declaration on the Convention (CRC) and Islamic Jurisprudence)

## Jainism

Jains aim to practice non-violence in action, speech and thoughts. In Jainism religion and culture have deep-rooted relevance to the development of humankind and to the moral, spiritual and philosophical aspects of life. The Lord Mahavir has preached that equanimity is the Dharma:

*“Know that violence is the cause of all miseries in the world. Violence is in fact the knot of bondage. Do not injure any living thing.”*

## Judaism

Chesed (kindness), compassion and justice are the classic Jewish values, and the nourishing and protecting of human life is of prime importance in Jewish law.

*“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”* (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat, 31a; Tobit 4:15)

*“No law of the Jewish Religion decrees physical punishment of children. It stands to reason that modern Jews repudiate all degrading treatment of children.”*

(Motern Narowe, Chief Rabbi Emeritus)

## Sikhism

Human Rights are the foundation of Sikhism. The fundamental tenet of Sikhism is that the formless creator, the Supreme Soul, resides in each individual. Each human being is entitled to equal respect and equal dignity no matter what the person's age, faith, belief or station in life.

*“Avoid harsh discipline. Of all the forms of punishment that a parent uses, the one with the worst side effects is physical punishment. Children who are spanked, hit or slapped are more prone to fighting with other children....”*

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» For further information on all aspects of faith-based support for the prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment of children, see [churchesfornon-violence.org](http://churchesfornon-violence.org) or email [chris@churchesfornon-violence.org](mailto:chris@churchesfornon-violence.org).

» For information on global progress towards prohibition and technical advice and support on law reform to achieve prohibition, see [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org) or email [sharon@endcorporalpunishment.org](mailto:sharon@endcorporalpunishment.org).

## **Pacific Conference of Churches**

During the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan, Korea, in 2013, an open statement – “Putting Children at the Center” – was endorsed by ecumenical bodies, alliances and child rights advocates, including the Pacific Conference of Churches.

*“In the accomplishment of God’s mission our churches, ecumenical bodies, interfaith networks, NGOs and inter-government organisations have to respond to the ethical, moral and spiritual imperative to uphold children’s dignity by:*

- *encouraging positive non-violent parenting where children can grow in an atmosphere of respect, love and compassion;*
- *working with others in the global movement to prohibit and eliminate corporal punishment of children;*
- *using the scriptures to promote peace, justice and non-violence in living with children;*
- *building partnerships with inter-government organisations, ecumenical partners and other faith communities and networks and alliances for promoting children’s rights.”*

The statement in full is at [churchesfornon-violence.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Putting-Children-at-the-Center.pdf](http://churchesfornon-violence.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Putting-Children-at-the-Center.pdf)

## **Statement by Caribbean Christian leaders in support of law reform**

In 2012 Christian leaders in Aruba, Guyana, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands signed a statement in support of law reform to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, clarifying the meaning of “discipline” and emphasising that physical punishment is incompatible with core religious values and that attempting to justify its use through religious texts is inappropriate. They stated:

*“Some Christian groups use their religion to justify physical punishment and may argue that it is sanctioned in scriptural texts such as in Proverbs 13:24, ‘those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them’. But it is not appropriate to take such texts out of their ancient cultural context to justify violence towards children. As Christians, our reading of the Bible is done in the light of Christ’s teaching and example. Jesus treated children with respect and placed them in the middle of the group, as in Mark 9:37: ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’”*

The statement in full is at [www.endcorporalpunishmentcaribbean.org/background/religious-support.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishmentcaribbean.org/background/religious-support.html)



# Faith-based support for prohibition of corporal punishment of children\*

## Canada: Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth

Endorsed by more than 500 organisations, including Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, Canadian Council for Reform, Judaism, Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers), English Catholic Council of Directors of Education (ECCODE), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Islamic Social Services Association Canada, Jewish Child and Family Services in Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa; Catholic education bodies in Alberta, Manitoba, Northwest Territories and Ontario; The Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association; The Salvation Army, Bethany Hope Centre, Central Eastern Division; The United Church of Canada, YWCA Canada.

## USA United Methodist Church

Two policies adopted: Corporal Punishment in Schools and Child Care Facilities (41037-CS-R9999) and Corporal Punishment by Parents and Caretakers (41038-CS-R9999).  
**Presbyterian Church USA** General Conference Policy 2012.

## Statement by Caribbean Christian Leaders

Signed by The Rt Revd L. Errol Brooks, Anglican Bishop of North Eastern Caribbean and Aruba; The Revd Dr Paul Gardner, President of the Moravian Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands; The Rt Revd Randolph George, former Anglican Bishop of Guyana; Sheila George, Anglican Diocese of Guyana; The Rt Revd Dr Howard Gregory, Anglican Bishop elect of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands; The Rt Revd Cornell Jerome Moss STM, Anglican Bishop of Guyana; The Revd Fr Marlon Simpson, Anglican Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands; The Rt Revd Dr Robert Thompson, Anglican Suffragan Bishop of Kingston.

## UK Church leaders

Signed a statement supporting equal protection for children from assault in the campaign to repeal the "reasonable punishment" defence in the Children Act.

## UK Muslim leaders

Signed a statement in support of law reform to prohibit all corporal punishment.

## Norway: Bishops' Conference

Called for new translations of the Bible in Norway to replace outdated language used to justify corporal punishment of children.

## Cairo Declaration on the Convention (CRC) and Islamic Jurisprudence

Adopted at a conference hosted by the Egyptian Government and co-sponsored by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) to mark the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and renew the commitment of OIC member states to its implementation, including prohibition of corporal punishment.

## Mauritania: Fatwa against corporal punishment

A study by the Imam Network of Mauritania with UNICEF found no place for violence against children in the Quran and lead to a Fatwa barring physical and verbal violence in the home and school.

## All Africa Conference of Churches

The 9th General Assembly of the AACCC in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008 resolved to embed child participation within the AACCC and its member churches. Proposals were made for member churches to ensure their country has prohibited all corporal punishment.

## Iran: Declaration on the Role of Religions and Religious Leaders in Confronting Corporal Punishment of Children

100 influential leaders from various faiths made a commitment to be advocates for children, to build a culture of respect for children's dignity and to confront violence against them, especially corporal punishment.

## Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

The SACBC has made two submissions to Parliament to support reform of the Children Act to prohibit corporal punishment by parents.

## A Multi-religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children (Kyoto Declaration)

Based on a multi-religious consultation in Toledo, Spain, involving religious leaders of all faiths from 30 countries, the Declaration was endorsed at the Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace at Kyoto, Japan.

## Open statement at the World Council of Churches 10th General Assembly – Putting Children at the Center

Endorsed at the General Assembly in Busan, Korea, by Anglican Federation of Evangelical Churches; Christian Conference of Asia; Pacific Conference of Churches; Latin American Council of Churches; All Africa Conference of Churches; Churches' Network for Non-violence; Global Network of Religions for Children; Ecumenical Center for Women's Studies in Cuba; Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA); Methodist Church in Britain; Toraja Church – Indonesia (PP SMGT); OROSA – Orissa Forum for Social Action – India; Consejo Unido de Educacion Cristiana-Argentina; Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia; Moravian Church – Nicaragua; Christian Council of Churches – Puerto Rico; Conference of European Churches (CEC); Parable Cambodia Ministries, and many others.

## New Zealand: Anglican Bishops'

Presented a signed statement in support of repealing the authorisation for corporal punishment by parents in the Crimes Act.

- National faith-based support for prohibition
- Regional faith-based support for prohibition
- International faith-based support for prohibition

## Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children

Signed up supporters of the aims of the Global Initiative include the Irish Bishops' Conference, Christian Muslim Forum UK, Methodist Church in Britain, Peace Mala Project for World Peace, The Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Guyana, The Mothers' Union in the Province of the West Indies, United Reformed Church UK and more than 130 religious leaders and other prominent individuals in faith communities worldwide.

\*Based on information held by the Churches' Network for Non-violence, May 2015