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President's foreword: Confronting violence against children

Every time I visit World Vision projects, I am taken to places where our work must address the damage done by people who inflict violence on children before we can make progress toward our development goals.

Boys forced to fight in militias. Girls raped as they struggle to make a living, trafficked for sex or married far too young. Even children murdered for body parts for witchcraft – like seven-year-old Robert whom I met in Uganda, partially paralysed after the community reacted just in time to save him from death.

Most violence against children is not so spectacular. I have seen children whipped into line in schools, slapped and demeaned at home, threatened and assaulted by police officers. Violence is the unspoken secret in every culture – everyone knows it happens, but nobody wants to talk about it. It's time to shine a light on it.

As a Christian organisation, World Vision is motivated by the belief that God loves every child. Scripture gives us the word of Jesus, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Allowing the routine cycle of violence to continue, generation upon generation, hinders children in every way. Why shouldn't we be the ones who bring an end to the repeating cry of pain which echoes down the generations?

These acts of sexual, physical and emotional violence threaten children's survival, health and education. They erode a country's human and social capital, slowing development and tearing at the fabric of society.

Families are the most important line of defence for children. We must help parents and care-givers to protect their children by offering them new skills and by improving family income and economic security.

Religious leaders and faith communities have a role to play. Many traditional beliefs about the right way to raise a child have been wrongly muddled up with religious practice.

Government action is vital. It is not enough to pass laws which outlaw child marriage, genital mutilation or physical beatings. Governments should measure success by the number of convictions, not the number of laws.

Teachers are crucial. We want children to spend their formative years getting an education which will benefit them and their nations, but teachers must recognise that their first duty is to keep pupils safe from harm.

Perhaps most of all, we need children and youth to know that it is their right to live without violence, and to stand up for one another – and for society to support them when they do.

Abusing a child is never justifiable, and it is preventable. From empowering children and youth to speak out, to equipping families, to campaigning against harmful traditional practices, we have plenty of evidence to show which interventions really work.

What has been lacking is the will. World Vision will play its part in a growing movement of empowered children and youth, of civil society and faith-based networks, of national governments and other partners. We will demand urgent action and drive progress for children wherever we work.

Every one of us is responsible to do our part to keep children safe. Join this campaign. Let's work together, and sow the seeds of a movement that spreads around every continent.

It takes a world, to end a world of pain for children.

Kevin J. Jenkins

President and Chief Executive Officer

World Vision International