



AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse

The Role of Faith Organisations in Safeguarding African Children Conference

Manchester

16 January 2007

Outcomes and Conclusions

Introduction

Faith organisations have a primary role in ensuring that children within their congregation are safe and that their places of worship are sanctuaries where children are protected from harm and abuse. The Role of Faith Organisations in Safeguarding African Children conference was organised by AFRUCA in partnership with the Manchester Children Safeguarding Board. It aimed to bring together key players in the area of child safeguarding to enable them dialogue, deliberate and jointly devise concrete solutions in efforts to enhance the work of faith organisations in safeguarding the children who attend their places of worship.

Conference Aims & Objectives

The conference further aimed to:

- Enable discussions and information exchange between faith organisations and practitioners on the safeguarding needs of African children
- Identify barriers in policy & service provision for faith groups to assist them in their work with children
- Explore future strategies to improve relations and communication between faith organisations and practitioners.
- Develop recommendations & strategies for policy & practice to ensure the safeguarding of African children within faith organisations

The Conference was held in partnership with:

- Manchester Safeguarding Children Board

And was supported by

- The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain
- Development Support Agency
- Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service

Key Themes

The conference focused on a number of key issues. These were:

- Culture, Religion, Female Genital Mutilation and the right of the Girl Child
- Exorcism, Witchcraft and African Churches
- Protecting Children in Madrassahs and working with the Islamic community.
- Developing and Implementing Child Protection Policies in churches
- Police initiatives to tackle faith based abuse
- Children and Families affected by HIV/Aids and integration into society

Issues Emerging

A number of key issues emanated from the various presentations and workshops at the conference. These included:

Presentations

1. Developing and Implementing child protection policies in Churches. (David Pearson, CCPAS)

- Churches needed to adhere to the statutory guidance given by government through the "Working together to safeguard children 2006"
- Effective systems of accountability within churches needed to be implemented
- -There should be more focus on the provision of training for Pastors and Church leaders in child protection policies
- A culture enabling the tackling of issues on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children should be fostered in churches.
- Accessible help and support for those who have experienced abuse should be available in churches.

2. The Muslim community (Dr G Siddiqui, The Muslim Parliament)

- The Muslim community is at present in a state of denial of the fact that child abuse takes place in places of worship including in mosques, madrasahs (mosque schools) and within Muslim families.
- Discussions with ex-teachers indicated that physical abuse is widespread. In *madrasahs* up to 40% hit or scold their pupils; cases of sex abuse, 15-20 per year, were considered by insiders as being an understatement.
- Madrasahs at present have no policies in place that meets their legal requirements under the Children Act 1989 nor is there a body that supervises and monitors their educational performance.
- Out of some 150 local authorities in England and Wales only a handful have taken positive initiatives, involving their local mosques and madrasahs, to put in place guidelines to meet their legal obligation as required by the Children Act 1989.

3. Culture, Religion, Female Genital Mutilation and the Rights of the Girl Child (Mary Kanu, DSA)

- Certain African communities justify the practice of Female Genital Mutilation as religious obligations even though Islam and Christianity, the two most prominent religions in Africa do not encourage it.
- Various high ranking Islamic clerics have made public statements denouncing the practice of FGM. These statements should be binding on all FGM practising communities who are Muslims.
- The Bible is very silent on FGM. The directive from God to have Abraham remove the foreskins of males born to him through circumcision is very clear in Genesis 17:10-14 and Genesis 21:3
- There is a clear line between: religion, culture and regressive attitudes towards women. FGM is not a religious duty and it should be classified as cruelty towards women and girls.
- The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 came into force on 3 March 2004. It replaces the 1985 Act and makes it an offence for the first time for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to carry out FGM abroad, or

to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad, even in countries where the practice is legal.

- Faith leaders should be vocal in clarifying that FGM has no place within their religion
- African women need to be educated about the health risks associated with the practice of FGM as they are the ones that perform these practices on other younger women.
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- While there is no clear danger of male circumcision, statutory bodies need to ensure that this practice is monitored to ensure that proper health care protocols are followed

4 Exorcism, Witchcraft and the African churches (Pastor J Kanyemesha, LFC)

- The Congolese Pastorship has been a key tool in informing Congolese church leaders of the need to develop better child protection policies and practices in their churches
- Local children safeguarding boards should work closely with groups like the Congolese Pastorship to push forward the agenda of safeguarding children
- Child Abuse generally flourishes in communities that are experiencing economic poverty. The government should make it its utmost priority to elevate people from economic poverty and social deprivation to help eradicate child abuse.
- Any practice which endangers the life of the person is sectarian and unchristian.
- Distinction must be made between those so called churches with sectarian practices and the true Pentecostal churches.

Workshops

5. Child Protection, Cultural Norms and Traditional Practices in Muslim Communities (Imam M Barkatulla, Finchley Mosque and Sharia Compliance Audit)

- Better collaboration is needed between agencies and Madrassahs to share information and education on appropriate child protection policies
- Muslim Clerics and Imams need to be engaged and supported in implementing child protection policies within mosques.
- It is evident that child abuse does occur within Madrassahs. The police and social services should not shy away from investigating these cases due to fear of community backlash or fear of being politically incorrect.
- It is vital that platforms are established to enable all parties (charities, mosques, community members and statutory bodies) to come together to discuss issues of concern regarding children in Islamic settings.
- Imams and teachers in Madrassahs (a lot of whom are from other countries) should be monitored and educated on issues that are faced by Muslim children within the UK.
- More attention should be given to successful projects such as the Kirklees Project and replicated throughout the UK in order to promote better child protection awareness amongst Islamic organisations in the country.

6. Police Initiative to tackling faith based abuse (Jason Morgan, Project Violet)

- 93 cases of child abuse related to accusations of possession and witchcraft in the UK and 32 in London was found by the Eleanor Stobart Research in 2006
- The police are experiencing great difficulties in identifying cases of child abuse related to witchcraft because whistleblowers are marginalised by the community if they inform the police. In some cases it is prominent leaders committing these wicked acts of torture.

- PV findings have demonstrated that it is impossible to confine these evil acts to a particular group, community or religion
- Schools and Non-Government organisations are best placed to identify these children who may be at risk because it is very likely that they would be using their services

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations were raised at the conference

1. More outreach work needs to be done within the African community to inform them of the new legislation regarding FGM and what implications it may have on them.
2. There should be better training for practitioners and other key staff in schools and in the health sector so they are aware of the signs and can act to safeguard potential victims of FGM.
3. The government should provide funding to faith groups to help implement child protection policies and to be able to regulate them more effectively.
4. More work needs to be done to educate parents about child protection and how to safeguard their children from abuse and harm.
5. Continuous networking and information sharing between professionals, African groups and others working with children is crucial
6. Project Violet should be rolled out on a national basis to help reach other communities outside London.
7. Article 22 of the Immigration Act undermines the Every Child Matters agenda and should be reviewed.
8. Programmes that engage community groups and leaders in implementing child safeguarding policies and practices need to be encouraged.
9. Imams and teachers in Madrassahs should be monitored by Local Safeguarding Boards and educated on issues that are faced by Muslim children within the UK.
10. To protect their integrity and in the best interests of children, it is important that all Madrasahs across the United Kingdom are mandated to put in place transparent and accountable child protection policies and procedures as a matter of urgency.

Appreciation

AFRUCA is grateful to the following for their support and contribution in helping making the event a success

- Manchester Children Safeguarding Board
- The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain
- Churches Child Protection Advisory Service
- Development Support Agency
- Finchley Mosque & Sharia Compliance & Audit
- Metropolitan Police (Project Violet)
- Barnardos
- Manchester Nigerian Community Centre
- Manchester Congolese Church
- Manchester Somalian Community
- Manchester Eritrean Community
- Manchester Ethiopian Community
- Broad African Representative Council, Manchester

Full Conference Report

A comprehensive report of this conference and the July 2006 Role of Faith Organisations in Safeguarding African Children conference held in London will be produced in March 2007. Price £10:99 per copy excluding postage and packing. To reserve your copy please email: million@afruca.org

AFRUCA training and development activities

AFRUCA recently produced a child trafficking advert aired on SKY TV network stations BEN TV and OBE TV over the Christmas and New Year holidays to raise awareness about the growth in the trafficking of African children to the country. Both network stations have an estimated 2 million viewers. The advert can be viewed on YouTube and on AFRUCA's official website.

AFRUCA organises regular conferences and provides in-house training for statutory agencies and others on issues around working with African children and families. We are also in the final stages of rolling out a national training programme for practitioners and multi agencies staff on key child safeguarding issues affecting African children including Culture and Child Protection, Female Genital Mutilation, Private Fostering, The Trafficking of African Children and Working with Faith Organisations to Safeguard African Children. Please contact us for further details on these.

In addition, AFRUCA has recently submitted a proposal for funding to enable it develop and run a comprehensive training programme on child protection for newly arrived African parents across London. If successful, the five-year programme will reach over 250 parents each year and help to further educate them about strategies to safeguard children from abuse and harm.

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