



Christian Conference of Asia

• Payap University, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000 Thailand
Tel: +66-(0)53-243906, 243907 Fax: +66-(0)53-247303

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CCA's Statement on World Children's Day–2021

The theme of World Children's Day–2021, 'A Better Future for Every Child', is a reminder to bring back the focus on children. Millions of children are denied the opportunity to access basic amenities in their lives. Such consequences will reverberate for years to come, threatening child rights.

UNICEF estimates that more than 168 million children have lost a full year of education because of school closures due to COVID-19 lockdown, while data from UNESCO shows that education has been significantly disrupted for over 800 million students worldwide, who lost two-thirds of an academic year on average. Poverty will also be a critical concern, as estimations of global growth by the IMF showed a contraction of 6.5 percentage points of GDP in 2021 compared to pre-COVID-19 projections, with an acute impact on low-income households who may then have to compromise on the education, health, and nutrition of children.

However, in the face of such challenges, stronger and more resilient recovery is still possible. Such times are calling upon us to develop, prepare, and implement clear recovery plans to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the several dimensions of children's growth and development—plans that are not just technical or practical approaches to resolving the pandemic's challenges, but that represent a promise and pledge made by the current adult generation to the upcoming generations to invest in their health, education, and overall wellbeing.

Vaccinations are now being gradually rolled out for children and young people. This is inspiring some governments to reopen schools and educational institutions—a hopeful sign that education and socialisation processes of children are being restored. Church-managed schools, educational institutions, and related agencies must continue to monitor and be vigilant about the physiological and psychological needs of children as they begin to return to school, paying close attention and extending full support as they re-adjust to daily life amidst strict protocols. As COVID-19 disrupted comforting and familiar life patterns such as going to school, socialising with peers and playing outdoors, lockdown deprived them of such important experiences, leading to an overall decline in mental and cognitive wellbeing. Additionally, churches must also build trust and encouragement in vaccines, as vaccine hesitancy has a profound impact on the ability of society as a whole to overcome COVID-19.

Another key area that requires immediate action is the climate emergency—a crisis that will also have the most significant ramifications on children's lives. Children are vulnerable to the changes in the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the food they eat, and are susceptible to life-threatening situations due to climate change and food insecurity.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) calls upon all member churches and councils to ensure that God's nurturing love and concern is reflected in all attitudes and actions within children's ministries. Churches and related organisations must strengthen and fine-tune their pastoral ministry and service to children and their families in this period of transition to normalcy. Care must also be taken to support and affirm children's rights to self-expression and participation by listening to, and taking into account, their experiences, feelings, and stories through Sunday School and children's fellowships.

World Children's Day–2021, observed every year on 20 November, is a reminder for us to take significant actions towards building a safer world and better future for our children. This is not a time for adults to work by themselves—we must not only invite, and listen to, children and adolescents, but also integrate their opinions and life experiences into such decision-making process for collaborative action. Let us provide spaces and opportunities for children and adolescents to voice their concerns and work together towards the common goal of 'A Better Future for Every Child'.

Mathews George Chunakara,
General Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia