



## PRESS RELEASE

### Rethinking children protection: Experts deliberate on challenges, solutions in the wake of COVID-19

**Nairobi, Kenya, 23rd May 2022** – Delegates from across Africa and partners from Europe and USA will convene from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, to confer on child protection problems and solutions in and for Africa, in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

The gathering on the topic *The Theology and Practice of Child Protection in Africa in Times of Pandemics* has been convened by the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network – Africa (JENA) of the Jesuit Conference on Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) in collaboration with The Vatican COVID-19 Commission – Africa Taskforce and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East and Southern Africa (AMECEA).

“The immense challenges that the COVID-19 global pandemic has brought to this region of the world has sharpened our thinking and made the need for deep reflection on how we care for and protect the most vulnerable in our societies ever more important,” observed Bishop Charles Kasonde, President, AMECEA. “How we care for and safeguard children must be at the heart of that discernment,” he added.

In attendance will be child protection experts representing the governments of Kenya, Uganda and Zambia. Other partners are religious organisations such as the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK), the Association of The Religious in Uganda (ARU), Changing the Way We Care and the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods. Also attending will be representatives from the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, US State Department and the United States Agency on International Development (USAID).

The conference will formulate recommendations in the form of operative theology and practical strategies regarding child protection that are faithful to God’s will and purposes. First and foremost will be the question of how best we protect children from various forms of violence, harm and abuse.

“The COVID-19 crisis and its impacts provide an opportunity for rethinking child protection,” said Fr Charles Chilufya, Director, JENA during a pre-conference interview. “The pandemic has exposed significant gaps in theories and practices of child protection when analysed from various contemporary perspectives, whether theological, scientific, cultural or social,” he continued.

Even though children have not been the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are probably among [the largest proportion of its victims](#). Children, of all ages, and in all countries, are being affected by the disease itself, particularly by the socio-economic impacts and, in some cases, by mitigation measures that may inadvertently have done more harm than good.

The pandemic is a universal crisis affecting all countries and peoples but for some children – especially in Africa – its impact is more specific to them and some of the impacts will be lifelong. Nor have the harmful impacts of the pandemic been equally distributed: they have been most damaging for

children, especially those already in vulnerable situations and in the poorest places and regions. Ultimately, the COVID-19 crisis has had and is still having a profound effect on children's wellbeing.

The outcome of the conference will be policy and context-relevant knowledge outputs for well-informed action to assure child protection.

**Resource:**

- [REPORT – Children and COVID-19: The pandemic's most vulnerable victims](#)

**JENA** – A diverse community of faith-inspired Jesuit non-governmental organisations, also known as Social Centres, related Jesuit institutions, individual Jesuit peace and development activists and scholars working collaboratively to fight poverty and related injustices around Africa empowering marginalised voices, communities and groups, and facilitating policy innovation to enable people to unlock their potential, exercise their rights and manage their own lives.

**Vatican COVID-19 Commission** – On 20 March 2020, Pope Francis asked the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) to create a Commission, in collaboration with other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and other organisations, to express the Church's solicitude and care for the whole human family facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on a wealth of expertise from local communities, global platforms, and academic experts, the Commission seeks bold, broad changes. The goal is not only to alleviate immediate suffering, but also to usher forth the transformation of hearts, minds, and structures toward a new model of development that prepares a better future for all.

**AMECEA** – A Catholic service organisation for the National Episcopal Conferences of eight Eastern Africa countries: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Djibouti and Somalia are affiliate members. AMECEA's mission is to inspire and empower God's family in AMECEA to be a credible and prophetic witness to Christ, by promoting unity, justice, peace, and solidarity.

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