

Anglican network starts campaign for birth registrations

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January 24 (ENInews)--In industrialized nations, a birth certificate is taken for granted, even regarded as a bit of tedious bureaucracy. But in the developing world, the existence of such a record can mean the difference between full participation in citizenship, or barely living.

That's why the International Anglican Family Network (IAFN) has launched a global campaign to register births. The network is calling on Anglican churches to partner with government and other agencies to ensure that babies born in 2012 and after are registered.

"More than just a legal formality, birth registration opens the door to education and healthcare," the IAFN said in a recent news release. "Without it, people may not be able to obtain a passport, own a house or land, or marry."

The network points out that more than one-third of children never have their births registered, "and so are significantly disadvantaged in their childhood as well as in their adult life. They are officially invisible; in a sense they do not exist."

Among the worst outcomes for someone whose birth was never recorded is that they are easily exploited in human trafficking, and as child soldiers and laborers, said the IAFN's Ian Sparks.

In its latest newsletter, IAFN makes clear the problems that can work against birth registration. For example, in Papua New Guinea, registrations are paltry because families have to travel long distances to log a birth. The result there is that only one per cent of the 260,000 children born each year are registered.

"Belonging is important to all human beings," IAFN president Bishop James Tenganenga told ENInews via e-mail. "Children, like the rest of us, need an identity and a nation or state to belong to. This is an inalienable right."

Indeed, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for the registration of babies "immediately after birth," followed by their right "to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents."

Birth certificates provide their recipients with access to a wide variety of services, Tengtenga said, including citizenship, justice, health care, education, and protection. Children without the document "can disappear without a trace."

The campaign is underscored by a biblical imperative, he added, as Jesus said, "whatever you do to (and for) the little ones, you do to me."

In a recent article, Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu claimed that every year in the developing world, the births of about 51 million children go unregistered.

A birth certificate is but "a small paper," Tutu said, "but it actually establishes who you are and gives access to the rights and privileges and the obligations of citizenship."

The IAFN noted some positive signs to date. Anglican churches in Uganda are encouraging parents to register births at baptism, while in Kenya, church-issued baptismal certificates allow births to be registered when there is no other documentation.

Meg Gardinier, director of the secretariat for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, reports that progress in promoting birth registration over the past decade highlights the crucial role of religious leaders and their ability to engage in partnership with others. "Clearly the Anglican Communion, whose 85 million members are in over 160 countries worldwide, has a vital role," she said.