



COUNT EVERY CHILD

BIRTH REGISTRATION: THE PASSPORT TO CITIZENSHIP



Uganda: children proudly show off their birth certificates.

Photo: Plan.

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INTRODUCTION BY ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

The child shall be registered immediately after birth and have the right from birth 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. 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 7

For most people in the developed industrialised world, birth registration is a non-issue. It happens almost automatically except for a very small 2 % of live births. Sadly, this is not the case for about 51 million children every year in the so-called Third or Developing World. But why should it matter?

Well, how do you prove that you are in fact the child of this father and this mother? It would be difficult to do so. For most children whose births are registered, the birth certificate would provide that documentary proof. And your birth certificate proves that you are a member of this rather than that nation. Recently those Americans who oppose President Obama alleged that he was not a native American but a naturalised one and thus did not qualify to become American President. The White House produced a certificate that showed he was born in a Honolulu hospital and his critics ended up with a bit of egg on their face. Our youngest child was born in London. We registered her birth in our South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square. Recently, November 2011

she decided she wanted a British passport because she did not want to pay for a visa each time she went to London or as a transit passenger through Heathrow. She obtained her British passport in a matter of days because the doctor who delivered her registered her birth more than forty years ago.

The Convention on the Rights of a Child, ratified at the UN in 1989, declares that each child has a right to an identity, to a name and requires that the birth be registered. These registrations enable governments to plan properly for the health, education, housing and other needs. The nationals of a country often qualify for various benefits. Without a birth certificate or registration that attests to one's nationality, identity, age etc, it is not easy to access such benefits as national health schemes, free or state-aided university education and other social benefits, or to be able to get a passport or a driver's licence.

Stateless persons are invariably vulnerable persons who have almost certainly not had their births registered. They are easily exploited in human trafficking, as child soldiers and child labourers.

We must all support the campaign for universal birth registration with its splendid slogan:

Count Every Child because Every Child Counts



World Day of Prayer and Action for Children

Globally one third of the world's children are unregistered and denied an identity. Without a birth certificate, these children grow up with no official identity. In fact, they are considered non-persons.

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child through an administrative process of the state and is coordinated by a particular branch of government. It is a permanent and official record of the existence of a person before the law.

On 31 October 2011, the global population is projected to pass seven billion persons and the process of birth registration will be even more urgent.

While birth registration is the first legal acknowledgement of a child's existence, the birth certificate gives the child a proof of his or her birth. A child without a birth certificate faces insurmountable challenges: he or she may not go to school; receive healthcare; prove their age; receive special protection as a minor; be adopted; obtain a passport; prove their nationality; take exams; marry; hold a driver's licence; inherit money or property; own a house or land; open a bank account; vote or stand for election.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained when he launched Plan International's universal registration campaign in 2005, "It is a small paper but it actually establishes who you are and gives access to the rights and the privileges, and the obligations of citizenship."

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Children in need of special protections face even greater hardships when their births go unregistered. According to UNICEF, millions of children worldwide are subject to sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, hazardous labour, domestic violence, recruitment by armed groups and harmful practices such as early child marriage. They also lack access to justice.

Children are not registered at birth for a variety of reasons, many of which can be overcome. Unregistered children are almost always from poor, socially excluded or displaced families and often have parents with low levels of formal education or live in countries where registration systems are not in place or not functional. Cost and distance to registration centres are the reasons most frequently cited by parents for not registering their children.

Political commitment and strategic partnerships are essential in establishing and implementing birth registration legislation, policies and initiatives.

UNICEF reports that countries have made significant progress in increasing birth registration in the last decade. Furthermore, they advise that political commitment and strategic partnerships are essential in establishing and implementing birth registration legislation, policies and initiatives.

These "lessons learned" during the past decade highlight the crucial role and influence of religious leaders and their capacity to engage in partnerships with others – government ministries and NGOs to support birth registration campaigns. Clearly, the Anglican Communion, whose 85 million members are in over 160 countries worldwide, has a vital role.

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NGOs and inter-governmental organisations offer the following advice for those interested in supporting birth registration campaigns in their countries:

- Support the creation of more effective government laws and structures to register births and enhance the capacity to undertake birth registration.
- Encourage legal reform to ensure birth registration that is *free of charge* and conducted *immediately after birth*.
- Clear the backlog of unregistered children, particularly in the aftermath of armed conflicts or natural disasters where normal processes have been disrupted.
- Organise grassroots networking and local-level initiatives to raise awareness and subsequently *increase the demand* for birth registration.
- Work with government, education and health sectors – midwives and obstetricians are key allies, as they can encourage parents to register their children. Schools are useful settings to coordinate birth-registration campaigns.
- Advocate increasing the quality of registrar-training to ensure efficiency and accuracy in recording of births. In many settings, those who are entering crucial data on birth registrations are poorly trained or their systems are outdated, resulting in serious errors.



Baby's finger prints being taken for birth registration process.

Photo: Plan/Cesar Bazan.

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children brings people together to pray and take action for the well-being of children on Universal Children's Day (20 November) every year. Universal Children's Day, established by the United Nations in 1954, also commemorates the 1989 adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The World Day has adopted a new three-year theme, **Stop Violence against Children**, and one of its priority areas is the promotion of birth registration.

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MAJORITY WORLD



Three women taking their newborn babies to the clinic for checks after giving birth at home the previous week.

Photo: G. Mola.

For people living in countries where newly born babies are registered as a matter of course, it seems strange that this does not apply everywhere, and yet to people living in many parts of the world, it is just as strange that they are being asked to do so. The prime reasons for this are that it is not part of their

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traditional practices, the systems don't exist for people easily to register their babies, and in many countries there is either no legal requirement for birth registration or the law is not enforced.

The problems are most acute for people living in rural areas with limited or no public transport, no money to pay for it and poor road systems. It is impractical for them to travel to administrative centres to register their births, particularly during the rainy season. In some countries, births are registered at the health facility where the baby is delivered but a high percentage of babies may be delivered unsupervised and are not recorded. In other countries, such as Papua New Guinea, Village Recorders travel between villages to record births, deaths and other population data. Our experience is that they are most active prior to elections, but are less diligent at other times because they may not be paid.

Some traditions may be major factors in non-registration and have severe consequences. A mother in one of the villages we visited in PNG gave birth to twins, which the people believed was the result of sorcery. So the mother didn't feed the babies, they died and were unceremoniously buried without their

existence ever being recorded. In some countries, boys are more highly valued than girls, resulting in female infanticide. When we were in Andhra Pradesh in India, three years ago, 13 dead female babies were found in the bottom of a well. It is unlikely that their births, and certainly not their deaths were recorded anywhere. To avoid this situation, at least one Catholic institution had in place a system for mothers to place their babies anonymously in a hatch, and then ring a bell to draw the attention of the religious sisters, before leaving without being identified.

A result of non-registration of births is that people may not know their age or their date of birth, which becomes problematic when parents apply for their children to start school, or when they need to apply for other official documents such as a passport. This situation can render both children and adults open to exploitation and abuse such as child labour and human trafficking and deprive them of benefits to which they might be entitled.

The governments of many countries are aware of the problem and legislating to deal with it, but this is only part of the solution. India has had legislation since 1969, but it is believed that almost 50% of births are unregistered. The Bill currently passing through the Kenyan parliament is accompanied by other measures such as a sensitisation programme for parents in rural areas and ensuring ease of registration. In Uganda, where registration is free for the under-fives, the Church is playing an important role in encouraging parents to register their children, including registration at the time of baptism. In Kenya, baptismal certificates issued by the churches enable birth registration to be obtained where no other documentation exists.

Birth registration is not just an important issue for individuals, but also for governments to enable them to plan services, particularly in health and education. It is too important not to be dealt with urgently.

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MALAWI



Children playing by Lake Malawi - are they registered?

Like most African countries, Malawi has a lot of children. Close to 65% of the population is youth. Our fertility rate is one of the highest in the world. An average family has six children. Unlike most African countries, Malawi does not have registration for its adult citizens, much less for its children. In a world where child trafficking and all kinds of abuse happen, this is a situation with serious consequences for children. The good news is that attempts are being made with the help of Plan International and UNICEF. Strangely, the Church has not been recruited in this exercise. I say strangely, because for a long time

The will to enforce these requirements is what is missing.

it was the under-five clinic chart-card and the baptismal certificate that have been considered official papers for identification purposes and determining people's ages. When it came to launching the current drive for birth registration, this significant partner has been ignored.

Plan International, in its report on this matter says:

Under the vital registration system, fewer than 5% of under-fives were registered. Between 1999 and 2003, registration took place in nine out of 28 districts, when 377,103 births and 191,944 orphans were registered. Now, about 10% of under-fives are registered. Just over 600,000 children have been registered through the village children's registers ...The Cabinet approved the National Registration Bill 2005, which included the compulsory birth-registration of all children.

All this sounds like great achievement; but is it? Surely, it should not take us much to get our act together for the good of our children? From colonial days, Malawi has had means of registering births, deaths, marriages, etc. The problem is not so

much the lack of legislation and resources because these services are available at every district commissioner's office. Yet most Malawians are unaware of this. The will to enforce these requirements is what is missing. This could even be devolved further to all hospitals so that the child is registered at birth. The forms already exist, and so the idea of pilot projects is taking the long route when a direct one already exists. Since quite a number of births still happen outside hospitals, those that would have been missed out would be caught in the net at under-five clinics and a significant number of these happen at Church premises in rural Malawi. Further, in the same way that baptism certificates have been accepted as legal documents for names and birthdates, these registers can also be used in the registration of children.

The Church is well placed to partner in this exercise and help to ensure that every child is counted.

Without being too optimistic, it would take less than one year to have every child registered in Malawi if we did this. Unfortunately, we choose the long route that will see a majority of our children continue to be undocumented. In the light of the politically and economically volatile situation in many African states, and given the reality of child trafficking, the need is an urgent one. It is amazing how the eighth Millennium Development Goal is not utilised to its fullest potential for the good of our children. The Church is well placed to partner in this exercise and help to ensure that every child is counted.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Lucky women who can access the antenatal clinic at a hospital in Port Moresby.

Photo: G. Mola.

The lack of birth registration in Papua New Guinea is indicative of a much greater problem. Papua New Guinea has the highest maternal mortality in the Pacific region. More than 700 women die in pregnancy and childbirth per 100,000 births. The reason for the lack of birth registration is the same as the reason for mothers dying from pregnancy-related issues. And that is because women are not able to access safe birthing assistance. Last year only 37% of women had a birth which was assisted by a person with midwifery training – the other 63% had their babies at home, in their village, probably on a dirt floor and with just their mother or sister in attendance. It has to be admitted that sometimes women who give birth at home do so absolutely alone.

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The reasons that women are not able to get to a rural health centre for basic birthing assistance are:

- most villages in Papua New Guinea are not connected by road to the local health facility
- many rural health centres do not have the capacity to provide expert midwifery care and women know this and decide just to stay at home
- some rural health facilities are so run down that they do not even have running water or electricity
- if one goes to a health centre, then there will be difficult issues like who is going to look after the children left behind in the village and who is going to provide you with food in the far-away health centre.

At the end of the day if you are not able to get to a health facility to have your baby, you will most likely not be able to

register the birth either. Indeed, even women who are able to get to a rural health facility to give birth are still not able to register the birth of their baby because this can only be done in the provincial capital or the national capital, Port Moresby.

It is estimated that there are about 260,000 births every year in Papua New Guinea, but only 1% of them are registered with the Registrar of Births and Deaths, even though if your birth is not registered this can cause problems for you later on in life when you want a passport or to apply for a scholarship or training overseas.



Woman rowing her canoe along a big river to a clinic to get antenatal care.

Photo: G. Mola.

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GHANA: Maternal Health Programme



Training birth attendants.

Photo: P.Holley.



The importance of statistics
Each year more than 536,000 women worldwide die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Many more survive, but will suffer illness and disability as a result of these complications. A recent decline in maternal mortality figures was noted in the year 2010, with a 34% reduction of the number of maternal deaths.

However, 99% of these deaths occurred in developing countries, many of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, an estimated 4 million deaths of newborn babies occur each year while a similar number of babies are stillborn. More than 95% of all these newborn deaths occur in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is hard to be accurate with these statistics since in these countries birth registration is not universally applied and many women and babies die without being recorded. Many children are not registered until some formal step in citizenship is required in their later childhood. So it is very difficult to measure the extent of maternal and newborn mortality and to measure progress.

The Anglican Health Network (AHN) and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine are working together to improve health services at district level in Sub-Saharan Africa for mothers and babies. This initiative starts with the ongoing partnership between the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, and Whiston Hospital, Merseyside, UK to provide training for midwives and traditional birth attendants in two health districts of Greater Accra. The combination of UK health service volunteers and medically-qualified local church members makes for a sustainable support network, closely coordinated with the district health authorities. Archbishop Justice Akrofi and his wife, Dr Maria Akrofi are working closely with AHN to establish a wider programme for the Province of West Africa and beyond.

Currently, an estimated 60 million women give birth at home alone or with the assistance of relatives or another member of the community who does not have accredited skills. In sub-Saharan Africa, the availability and uptake of skilled care is still very low – particularly in rural areas. It is well documented that the lack of trained people, the poor infrastructure of roads, the distance of many rural communities from health facilities, people's cultural beliefs, practices and preferences, poverty and gender roles and attitudes to women combine to limit or restrict many women's ability to access formal maternity services.

The programme will improve access to skilled birth attendants and, in doing so, will pay close attention to the issue of birth registration...

One of the key tasks of AHN's maternal health project will be to facilitate better statistics. Birth registration can be encouraged when a woman comes to a medical facility, but with the majority of women in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa giving birth at home, the likelihood of registration is lower. The AHN Maternal Health project will work to use technology such as mobile phones to help with learning, communications and recording data. The programme will improve access to skilled birth attendants and, in doing so, will pay close attention to the issue of birth registration and providing ongoing support to the district authorities to build up their information and statistics on births and the health of mothers and babies. This is a vital step in ensuring that "every child counts" and fewer women and children die at birth.

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Little Aboriginal girl in Darwin.

Birth registration and the indigenous population

As shown in Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, birth registration is a fundamental human right in international law. This expresses recognition of the child as a subject of rights and guarantees that the child has access to a name and nationality.

In Australia, a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are unable to obtain a birth certificate because their birth was never registered, or they cannot satisfy the Births, Deaths & Marriages Identity Document requirements. The result is a notable gap between the birth registration rates of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Of the 9,900 children born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers in Australia in 2005, 13% were not registered. This translates to 1,300 children.

Under-registration of births is a well known problem in developing nations. In Australia, a birth certificate is the gateway to the full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship. It is necessary in order to obtain a passport, get a driver's licence, attain a

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tax file number and is also frequently required in order to access social security and open a bank account. Without a birth certificate, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to fully participate in society.

Apart from the problems for the individual and their families, there are other consequences to this under-registration of births in the indigenous population of Australia. It affects their universal right of equal access to quality care. Governments have an international obligation to improve the health and well-being of minority, disadvantaged and marginalised population

groups. But if we are to know whether this is being done among indigenous infants and children worldwide, then we must be able to acknowledge the existence of indigenous people in population statistics. This is not possible if indigenous children are 'invisible'. Further, as infant and early childhood mortality statistics are important indicators of a population's health, an accurate picture of child mortality gives a wider picture of indigenous people's well-being and progress or lack of it. This is particularly valid as

causes of infant and childhood death such as infections are potentially preventable. Others, such as low birth weight or premature birth can be treated with good health care. Studies of the trends in mortality and related statistics demonstrate the changing health status of the population and enable the effect of health policies and services to be monitored and evaluated.

However, a statistical approach to measuring indigenous peoples' enjoyment of the right to health has its limitations due to issues of accuracy and identification. Problems are generally due to a combination of different classifications of indigenous people, the changing willingness to identify indigenous status, and/or inconsistencies in the questions asked by staff.

Identifying indigenous peoples globally is also confounded by differences in classification across borders and customs. Sometimes identification can rely on self-identification, require legal proof of identify, and/or proof from the community.

Without increased birth registration and accurate identification of indigenous people in health statistics, we cannot accurately describe and monitor indigenous births and deaths and children's health. We cannot answer the questions: who are our indigenous peoples? What is their current standard of health and how does it compare to other members of the population? Why is their health so poor and how can opportunities for better health care and health outcomes be supported and increased? And we cannot know if we have achieved the stated targets identified under national and international goals to reduce significantly the infant and child mortality rates within a decade. Only with such accurate identification of indigenous people will we be able to know whether we are, indeed, a just and moral society.

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PHILIPPINES



Manila street children.

Jigsaw Project's ministry to "invisible children"

"These are invisible children. If they are not registered, then in a sense they don't exist," says UNICEF Philippines Child Protection Officer Forough Foyouzat. "Unregistered children are also easy prey for traffickers."

He had no birth registration – like thousands of other children he was INVISIBLE.

When we first began to work with children in urban poor areas of Manila, the first thing on our mind was safety and clothing and food. I didn't understand the vital importance of birth registration. I had read the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but I couldn't understand the necessity of article 7, 'Every child has the right to a legally registered name' – we kept passing it by.

In early 2000, we met Santiago begging on the streets. He was half blind and in terrible condition. Jigsaw took him into their hearts and his story unfolded:

When Santiago was 12, a man approached his mother in the province promising to help his deteriorating eye condition. He promised to take him to the big city Manila for an operation; the family celebrated their good fortune and off Santiago went with their new-found friend. Fifteen years later a story of such pain sat within us. Santiago was taken to Manila and at the age of 12 was locked in a small room inside a brothel; he described the trauma of the first time he was sold to a man and the subsequent years. He was regularly beaten and taken from place to place. He tried to escape and showed us the rifle butt marks on his head where he was punished. His parents had been to the police and had tried to find him, but to no avail. He had no birth registration – like thousands of other children he was INVISIBLE.

Children who do not have birth registration become even more vulnerable; they are not registered, they do not exist, they can be sold, trafficked and abused without trace. They also become outside the social systems; they cannot go to school, register for care and help and often do not have a fixed name, their name changing with their circumstance or needs. They are non-people.

Domestic violence, split families, unemployment, pressures of poverty and corruption in the government are among the many factors that make a Filipino child feel desperate for better living conditions and a new life. City slums are constantly growing, child labour is widespread and, according to a 2000 UNICEF estimate, more than 200,000 children live on the streets in unsafe and highly vulnerable situations. The UN has identified the Philippines as one of the worst Asian countries for child trafficking, stemming from poverty, family breakdown, poor educational and employment opportunities. (L R Salaido: CMS mission partner.)

It is against this backdrop that Jigsaw is committed to its vision "To see children, young people, families and communities transformed by the love of God and growing in the 'wholeness' of God".

Jigsaw works with over 1,800 children in four urban areas of the Philippines and believes that the best ways are God's ways and the created plan for children to grow is loving and caring family/households in loving and caring communities.

Because of this, Jigsaw's mission is to follow Jesus and bring children into the 'midst'.

Central to Jigsaw's work is 'children being children' as God created them. A key factor for children to 'be' as God intended, is the need for safety and security; key to this is a child having a name and being registered as a member of a society.

Jigsaw works to register the children and to empower the community via education to understand the vital importance of birth registration.

Many of the 2,000 children Jigsaw work with arrive without a birth registration certificate. The reasons are many: cost, lack of education, being born in difficult circumstances. One of Jigsaw's aims is to work on behalf of the child to register the child and to obtain for them a birth registration certificate. The Jigsaw social work team, headed by our senior social worker and our welfare officer, works closely with the child (and any living relatives) to form a case for their birth registration under the guidance of the Department of Social Welfare. The registration is a time-consuming and expensive process (enough to stop any families struggling in poverty embarking upon it). The registration is lodged with the City Hall. An average case with a resulting birth registration certificate costs around 2,500 pesos (£36.00) per child – a fortune to families in the Philippines.

Birth registration brings self-esteem... it contributes to the building of the value of a child – deep things that are beyond value – it cements something that allows children to begin to grow as 'whole' children of God.

However it is much cheaper if done at birth. Jigsaw works to register the children and to empower the community via education to understand the vital importance of birth registration.

Birth registration is vital to bring safety and security for a child. It also enables a child to participate in society, but Jigsaw's experience is that the importance of birth registration goes much further than even this. Birth registration brings self-esteem, it helps a person be complete, it contributes to the building of the value of a child – deep things that are beyond value – it cements something that allows children to begin to grow as 'whole' children of God. We are learning the basic right of article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 2009, Jigsaw was given an award by Quezon City Hall for its holistic work with children in need and its work on birth registration.

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Tim and Kate Lee are CMS Mission Partners.**

UNITED KINGDOM



Photo posed by a model © Shutterstock.

Help needed for asylum-seeking and refugee children.

Undocumented migrant children

It is estimated that there are currently 155,000 undocumented migrant children living in the UK. The majority of these children – around 85,000 – were born in the UK to parents who have an irregular migrant status. Their parents came to the UK seeking protection from persecution, war and violence. Their asylum claims were refused but they remain in limbo in the UK because they fear for their safety and are unable to return. Other children came to the UK on their own, unaccompanied by any adult.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was ratified in the UK in 1991, every child has the right to education, health and somewhere to live. States must protect each child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of their status. The UN Committee has made it clear that migration control cannot override considerations of the best interests of the child.

Despite this, a child's immigration status and lack of

documentation pose serious barriers to children accessing school places, vital health services and a place to live. Children whose parents are not allowed to access mainstream benefits or allowed to work, find themselves destitute without any means of obtaining basic essentials like food, clothes and nappies. Worryingly, these children and their parents are prevented from accessing essential health services, putting their lives at great risk. Although in theory undocumented migrant children should have free access to primary and emergency health care, in reality many experience difficulties in registering with a doctor. They may also be liable to pay for secondary health care. Immediately necessary treatment, such as maternity care, must never be withheld, yet many are still denied treatment or required to pay thousands of pounds. This is alarming since asylum-seeking women are seven times more likely to develop complications during pregnancy and childbirth and three times more likely to die than the general population due to a number of factors including poor

This is likely to lead to even more undocumented migrant children and families, who are destitute and unable able to pay, to avoid accessing health care for fear of being reported and removed from the country. We call on the Government to put in place measures to ensure that all children, regardless of immigration status, are able to access health care services as and when they need it.

nutrition, trauma caused by rape or other forms of sexual violence or female genital mutilation. Some women will have no choice but to deliver at home without the support of any professionals, putting themselves and their newborns at great risk.

New rules that come into effect this year place a duty on National Health Service staff to provide details of patients owing £1,000 or more, to the UK Border Agency. This is likely to lead to even more undocumented migrant children and families, who are destitute and unable able to pay, to avoid accessing health care for fear of being reported and removed from the country. We call on the Government to put in place measures to ensure that all children, regardless of immigration status, are able to access health care services as and when they need it.

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Editor's note. *The Children's Society is a major voluntary organisation, linked with the Church of England, working to improve the lives of children through advocacy and practical projects.*

PAKISTAN



A better future - if she is registered.

Birth registration provides the right of name and nationality and helps a child to secure the rights to his or her origins and also helps to safeguard other human rights of education and health. Nationality is one of the most sensitive and complex of aspects associated with birth registration. The registration system can help to protect children against illicit changes to their identity, such as change of name or falsification of family ties. If children are arrested, a birth certificate can protect them against prosecution as an adult and ensure that they receive any special legal protection that should be made available to juveniles. This is important even in relation to the most trivial crimes, but when it comes to serious crimes in countries where the death penalty is imposed, proof of age can mean the difference between life and death.

Orphans and internally displaced and refugee children who have become separated from their parents, or whose papers have been destroyed, and the children who belong to unmarried parents or parents of different nationalities find difficulty in registering.

The first Registration Act was passed in 1973 to register all citizens of Pakistan and the identity card for adults and B Form for children under 18 were issued under the Interior Ministry. In 1996, The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) issued the computerised National Identity Card (NIC) – now the only valid one. Every citizen is required to have a NIC number for many activities such as getting a driver's licence, getting a phone, gas or electricity connection, enrolling in college and opening a bank account.

The ID card includes the following information: name, gender, father's name (husband's name for married females),

identification mark, date of birth, family tree ID number, address, date of issue and expiry, signature, photo, and thumbprint. NADRA also records the applicant's religion but this is not noted on the card itself.

In Pakistan, the Roman Catholic Church is the only church that has been doing the job of registering the birth of a child and has the family record regarding birth or death. The other churches produce the Baptism certificates. But now these have no legal value because of the importance of NADRA's registration. There are different desks at local level that register the birth of child, i.e. municipal, cantonment, local union council or hospital in which the birth took place.

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A mother's story

The mother brings the child into this world but can't give identity to her own child in certain societies because it is the father who gives identity.

I know a woman who lives in Pakistan; she was married at the age of thirteen. She was not registered by her parents. At that time, some forty years ago, there was not a proper system for birth registration so many children could not get their name registered. She married a Christian man who used to beat her very badly. She left her husband's home with her children and took shelter at her mother's place. In just two years she had given birth to two children to fulfil her husband's desire, without thinking about her health, family planning and other financial matters. Unfortunately, like her, the children were also not registered either in the city council or in the Church.

It was now important for her was to become free of her husband. Someone suggested that because according to the Christian marriage act, divorce is not possible, if she wanted to end her relation with him, accepting Islam as a faith could be the best solution. According to Islamic law in Pakistan, the conversion of married women to Islam automatically terminates the marriage.

Now there was no possibility to get her children's names registered in the Church record as she was legally no longer a Christian. She continued as a single mother for a few months but then met a Muslim man and married him.

Twenty years have now past, and the children are grown up, but they are not registered anywhere. They don't have national identity cards or legal proof of their age and identity. They can't travel overseas. Neither she nor her children have ever been able to exercise their right to vote.

Her son wants to have a Muslim identity and her daughter wants to have a Christian one. It's really difficult for her to cope with this situation and she does not know what to do.

Contact Person: Moseena Rana, c/o IAFN office; for address see p12



Photo: *Comunión Perú.*

Diocesan Social Worker Erika Montoya with Yuliana Acebedo, who for 87 years had no national document of identity. Now, at last, she has one!

Church programmes to assist birth registration

In Peru, many adults and children living at the margins of society or in isolated, rural communities have no birth certificate or national document of identity. No form of government recognition means no access to a broad range of basic social goods such as government health insurance, healthcare, education and the state 'Glass of Milk' subsidy programme, and

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exclusion from formal participation in society. It can also mean the perpetuation of social exclusion and poverty from generation to generation, since adults without a national document of identity are unable to register their children.

But churches, naturally based in communities, can make the necessary practical links, educate about the importance of registration, and perhaps reassure a mother that those approaching her about documentation don't want to take her children away.

Comunión Perú, the NGO of the Anglican Diocese of Peru, has been working alongside hundreds of families and individuals to assist them in gaining their legal identity. The Peruvian government runs campaigns encouraging identity card applications and offers the service free of charge to people who are poor, or who have disabilities or special needs, or are over 65. However, the government doesn't have sufficient staff or capacity to go searching for people who are unregistered or to

work face-to-face with families in order to overcome their ignorance and fear of the registration process. But churches, naturally based in communities, can make the necessary practical links, educate about the importance of registration, and perhaps reassure a mother that those approaching her about documentation don't want to take her children away. Where there are complications – for example, where a lone parent has abandoned the family home leaving behind children without documentation and therefore without the possibility of attending school – then church workers consult with experts to find out how best to assist.

There are instances where individuals are too elderly or infirm to travel to the state registration office, so

Comunión Perú arranges for the registration process to be taken to them – by picking up and taking the registrar to the person's house, and paying the taxi fare.

Comunión Perú can help here too – by arranging transport to take families to the registry office in Lima so that they can collect certificates personally.

Two years ago, the Peruvian government decided that children should have an identity card from the time of their birth, instead of waiting until the age of 18. To obtain this card, a birth certificate must be shown. Where a baby is born in a hospital, parents can obtain a birth certificate before returning home. But it may be that they are then unable to travel back to the city to collect identity cards because they have neither the means nor the money for the trip. Diocesan Social Worker Erika Montoya relates how, in one instance, because of the good relationship built up between the Anglican Church and the state registry office in Lima, she was able to collect identity cards on behalf of 100 children. Erika isn't permitted to collect birth certificates where these are missing, but Comunión Perú can help here too – by arranging transport to take families to the registry office in Lima so that they can collect certificates personally.

Lucha Fallaque, a member of the Anglican cathedral in Lima, has worked for many years with prisoners at the Santa Mónica women's prison in Chorrillos, south of Lima, teaching skills and helping them to sell handicrafts in order to generate some income. Where necessary, she also assists the women – and their children – to gain their identity card. The children of women in the Santa Mónica prison are able to remain with their mothers until the age of three years, when they must leave. These children need documentation so that they can go to school and have some degree of security in the future.

Assisting with birth registration and identity documentation is one small part of *Comuni3n Per3*’s ministry. Led by Director Fr Carlos Quispe, its small staff pursue a variety of programmes and social outreach, for example, educating and raising community awareness of environmental and health issues; assisting people with tuberculosis, especially the elderly, who are unable to travel through their own means to collect medication; and working to prevent and end violence in the family.

By living and working in marginalised communities where the provision of even basic necessities such as water, electricity and sanitation are absent, Comuni3n Per3 and members of the Anglican churches in the Diocese of Peru are able – even with very limited resources – to meet people at their point of need ...

The staff work collaboratively with government initiatives, bringing benefit into local communities: the *Programa Integral Nacional para el Bienestar Familiar* – INABIF (National Institute for the Wellbeing of the Family), the *Defensoria Municipal del Ni3o y el Adolescente* – DEMUNA (Municipal Protection of Children and Adolescents) and the *Ministerio de la Mujer y Derechos Humanos del Per3* – MIMDES (Peruvian Ministry for Women and Human Rights).

By living and working in marginalised communities where the provision of even basic necessities such as water, electricity and sanitation are absent, *Comuni3n Per3* and members of the Anglican churches in the Diocese of Peru are able – even with very limited resources – to meet people at their point of need and respond in ways that faithfully and creatively reflect and teach God’s love, reassure adults and children of their God-given dignity and worth, and assist them in the long and difficult climb out of poverty.

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THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

The next IAFN newsletter, to be published early in 2012, will be on the theme of **Divided Families**. We are looking for articles about practical projects, linked with churches, to help families with parents working abroad, separated parents and families with children who are absent or missing.

Please contact the Network office for further details.

Bishop Pat Harris, Chair of IAFN

The truth, that “Every child counts”, is rooted in the very nature and character of God. For God is the loving heavenly Father of us all. Furthermore, it was the Lord Jesus who rounded on his disciples when they tried to get rid of little children who came to him. He warmly embraced them, saying, “For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”.

If the churches are truly to reflect the character of God the Father and the example of Jesus, God’s Son, then we too must do everything possible to work with the state, other agencies and our communities to provide protection and provision for children. And the most basic need is for Birth Registration, for by this, it is recognised that a child exists and that every child counts.

A Prayer for ensuring every child matters

Creator of humankind and giver of all life:

We thank you for the treasure
of each child born in your image;

May they be blessed with a loving family
and caring community.

Guide parents in the giving of a name,
and grant that by proper civil registration

each child may receive:

respect for their identity,

the benefit of citizenship,

and regard for their uniqueness of spirit;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Revd John Bradford

IAFN is an Anglican forum for the exchange of information about challenges facing families in different countries and contexts, and the practical work being undertaken by churches and individual Christians. See website www.iafn.net for further information and how to receive the newsletters electronically or in the printed version.

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