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## **ARCA OPEN LETTER TO PARENTS, TEACHERS, PRIESTS, POLITICIANS, AND SOCIETY**

*Protect Children's Right to Cognitive Autonomy — For Sign & Share*

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Every child is born free. Free to observe, to question, to wonder, and to form their own understanding of the world. That freedom is the most fundamental cognitive right a human being possesses.

Yet in every country on Earth, children are formally enrolled in religious institutions before they can read, before they can evaluate evidence, and long before they possess the cognitive capacity to consent to an identity that will shape their entire lives. No comparable decision — marriage, military service, voting, permanent body modification — is permitted without informed consent and minimum-age protection.

Religion alone remains exempt. The Age of Religious Consent Act (ARCA) proposes to close that gap.

ARCA is not anti-religious legislation. It does not restrict adult belief, family religious practice, or comparative religious education. It establishes, for the first time, a child-protection threshold for formal religious enrolment — modelled on existing consent law, grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and applied identically across all religious and non-religious traditions.

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***A religion assigned before a child can think is not faith — it is***

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## The Problem: One Unprotected Frontier

Child-protection law governs every irreversible, identity-defining decision available to a minor. The table below illustrates the gap:

Decision	Min. Age	Reason for Protection
Marriage	18	Psychological and relational maturity
Military enlistment	18	Capacity to understand life risk
Voting	18	Capacity for political reasoning
Permanent body modification	16–18	Permanence and informed choice
<b>FORMAL RELIGIOUS ENROLMENT</b>	<b>NONE</b>	<b>No protection exists anywhere on Earth</b>

Religion shapes identity, moral values, worldview, and life decisions more profoundly than any of the decisions above. Yet it receives no informed-consent protection in any democracy on Earth. This is the central contradiction at the heart of child-protection law. ARCA resolves it.

## Five Addresses — One Appeal

### To Parents — Guide, Do Not Program

You love your children. That love is not in question. But consider honestly: is teaching a child that they will burn in hell for doubting the faith an act of love? Is it love to condition a child to suppress questions in order to remain safe within the family belief system?

You have the right to share your beliefs with your children. You do not have the right to make them permanently responsible for a religious commitment before they can understand it. Guide them. Answer their questions honestly. A child raised with cognitive freedom may still choose your faith — but the choice will be genuine, and it will be theirs.

### To Teachers — Teach Thinking, Not Compliance

You see children daily. You observe the anxious, the self-suppressed, those visibly burdened by religious obligation. Your professional responsibility is to develop independent thinkers. Logic applies to all claims equally. A child who learns to ask for evidence in science class must be able to apply that same skill to religious claims. Teach this consistently — it is the foundation of every other education.

### To Priests and Religious Leaders — Wait for Consent

Children cannot consent to baptism. Children cannot consent to formal religious enrolment. Children cannot consent to a theology of eternal punishment. These procedures are performed on people who have no capacity to understand or refuse them.

The most courageous act available to you is this: wait. Invite people to your faith when they are adults. If your message is true and your community is good, they will find you. If you must capture them before they can think, that is not faith. That is recruitment.

### **To Politicians — Pass the Law**

You already protect children from every other form of life-altering decision before they reach cognitive maturity. This is the only category in which you do not. Closing this gap is not ideological. It is consistent.

ARCA is grounded in UNCRC Articles 3 and 14, ECtHR jurisprudence (Hoffmann v. Austria; Vojnity v. Hungary), the cognitive liberty framework (Ienca and Andorno, 2017), and Feinberg's right to an open future. It has been submitted for peer review to the International Journal of Children's Rights (manuscript CHIL-1750). The legal foundation is in place. The political will is what remains.

### **To Society — Demand the Law**

Politicians respond to public pressure. Laws change when people demand them. You do not need to be an atheist to support ARCA. You need only to believe that children have the right to think before they are told what to believe — and that fear is not an appropriate tool for raising them.

If you experienced religious trauma in childhood — if you were taught to fear, to suppress, to obey without question — you already know what this law would have protected you from. Tell your story. Support this legislation. Protect the next generation from what you experienced.

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## **The Last Unprotected Frontier of Childhood**

Society has progressively expanded its protection of children across every domain of life. Physical safety. Educational access. Protection from labour, from sexual abuse, from chemical and physical harm. One frontier remains: the freedom of the mind.

Children's cognitive autonomy is the final unprotected right in child-protection law. ARCA closes this gap — not to protect children from religion, but to protect their right to authentic cognitive development, from which any genuine faith, or genuine non-belief, can honestly emerge.

***A child raised with freedom of thought may choose to believe. A child raised with freedom of thought may choose not to believe. Either outcome is valid. What is not valid is making that choice for them before they can make it for themselves.***

**No jurisdiction has yet enacted a statute of this kind. ARCA can be the first.**

*Yours in support of children's cognitive freedom,*

## **Senad Dizdarević**

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### **Supporting Academic Materials**

**Figshare preprint:** DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.32755842

**Journal submission:** International Journal of Children's Rights (Brill) — manuscript CHIL-1750

**Legislative Proposal PDF:** The Age of Religious Consent Act (ARCA): Legislative Proposal

**Full open letter:** <https://god-doesntexist.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Age-of-Religious-Consent-Open-Letter-to-Parents-Teachers-Priests-Politicians-and-Society-to-Protect-Childrens-Freedom-of-Thought.pdf>

**All resources:** <https://god-doesntexist.com/the-age-of-religious-consent-act-arca-protect-childrens-cognitive-autonomy/>

## **Sign & Share the ARCA Open Letter**

Read the full academic paper · Download the Legislative Proposal · Write to your representative

All resources: <https://god-doesntexist.com/the-age-of-religious-consent-act-arca-protect-childrens-cognitive-autonomy/>

# **THANK YOU!**

