



**STATEMENT BY MR. S.K. BWISWMUTHIARY, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 67:
PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN THE
THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 60TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL
ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 17, 2005**

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children, and the report of his Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, and the report of the independent expert on violence against children.

Mr. Chairman,

Of the 2.2 billion children under the age of 15 in the world, an estimated 1 billion live in poverty. It is estimated that every day 29,000 children under the age of five die largely from preventable diseases, resulting in 10.6 million deaths each year. The best estimate is that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for reducing under-five mortality will remain unmet in Sub-Saharan Africa well into 22nd century. Moreover, a large percentage of children in Sub Saharan region would be severely deprived of shelter, water, sanitation, education, information, health and nutrition, as compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world. These are stark reminders for the international community to pay more attention to the development of children everywhere, with special focus on regions where there are most vulnerable, such as Sub Saharan Africa.

Without addressing the underlying causes of the miserable condition of one-half of the world's children, very little can be achieved. While the need for focussing our attention on children's rights' is paramount, there should be commensurate attention and support to children's developmental needs - first and foremost, adequate and nutritious food, together with civic amenities; secondly, basic health services; and thirdly, access to education.

The inter-related aspects of poverty, development and rights of children are self-evident. How can we expect the rights of children to be protected when the overwhelming concern of day-to-day living in many countries is not that of rights, but

the more basic question of survival, of food for one more day in a situation of extreme and abject poverty? A better understanding of the underlying inter-linkages is required for addressing the important issue of development of children. We would urge specialised funds and agencies to give special attention to these aspects in their future studies. We welcome the initiatives of the Secretary-General for an in-depth study of violence against children.

Mr. Chairman,

India is fully committed to the goals of 'A World Fit for Children', which was adopted at the special session of the UN General Assembly in 2002. The Optional Protocol of the Convention on Rights of the Child relating to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography has been ratified by India, and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict is in the process of being ratified.

India is home to the largest child population in the world. We share a deep concern about the status and welfare of children, who comprise 41% of the country's population. India's commitment to children is reflected in various Articles in the Indian Constitution. Importantly, it pledges that "the State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment".

Elementary education is a Fundamental Right in India. The government has resolved to increase public spending on education to at least 6% of the GDP. At least half of this amount would be spent in the development of the primary and secondary education sectors. To pursue universal elementary education in a mission mode, *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, i.e. Universal Elementary Education Scheme, has been launched, covering the entire country. There is a special emphasis for girls under this Scheme. For achieving major national nutrition, health and education goals, India had started the Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS] Programme in 1975. This programme has now emerged as a unique and perhaps the largest Early Childhood Development Programme in the world, with more than 5,400 projects across the country extending services to over 41 million beneficiaries, comprising over 34 million children in the 0-6 years age group and over 7 million pregnant and lactating mothers. To supplement the efforts of the ICDS and to provide a holistic and coordinated intervention to combat malnutrition among children, the National Nutrition Mission, was launched in 1993.

Several legislations have been enacted to ensure protection of children rights. India is committed to eliminate child labour in all its forms and is moving in this direction in a targeted manner. The Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act bans employment of children below the age of fourteen years in factories, mines and hazardous environments, and also it regulates the working conditions of children in occupations where they are not prohibited from working. The strategy to eliminate child labour in all its forms recognizes that it is inextricably linked with poverty and illiteracy, cannot be solved by legislation alone, and that a holistic, multi-pronged and concerted effort to tackle this problem, is necessary. The National Charter for Children was adopted in 2003 to provide, inter alia, the right to be protected from economic exploitation and for the protection of the girl child against neglect, maltreatment and various forms of abuse.

A National Policy of Action for Children has been adopted at the beginning of 2005. It commits to extending all rights to all children upto the age of 18 years, by encompassing child survival and development, child protection and child participation. The Government of India is in the process of establishing a National Commission for Children for the better promotion and protection of child rights within the larger context of upholding values to strengthen the family, society and the nation.

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the work of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict. The recommendations on reaching out to children involved in armed conflict, both combatants and victims, and reintegrating them and, most importantly, taking into account local values and traditions in activities related to alleviating the plight of children in or after armed conflict, are important. Those who seek to promote their own agendas either through armed conflict or terrorism, use children without a scruple. It is essential that measures to ameliorate the plight of such children be evolved through a consensual approach involving the Member States and the relevant UN Bodies.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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