



STATEMENT BY MS. MABEL REBELLO, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 63: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 13, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

The children of the world are the future of humanity. They must live in peace and security and with full dignity and without want. We should dedicate ourselves to this noble goal. The challenge before us is enormous, given that at the current rates of growth about 8.7 million children under-five will die in 2015, 117 million children will continue to be excluded from primary education, while about 180 million children will be affected by malnutrition. The best estimate of achieving the Millennium Development Goal 4 of reducing under-five mortality will remain unmet in Sub-Saharan Africa well into the 22nd century. The international community must, therefore, pay more attention to the development of children everywhere, with special focus on regions where they are most vulnerable, such as Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr Chairman,

Addressing the underlying causes of the miserable condition of one-half of the world's children is of paramount importance. Poverty eradication, sustained economic growth and realisation of the rights of children are mutually reinforcing. While focussing our attention on children's rights, commensurate attention and support should be paid to children's developmental needs; adequate and nutritious food, together with civic amenities; basic health services; and access to education. Hence, timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a key step towards meeting our commitments to children. Dwindling resources at the disposal of developing countries to tackle the problems facing children is a serious concern, and hence the continued importance of implementing of ODA commitments by the developed countries.

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict for his report, which presents an overview of the plight of children in situations of armed conflicts and also outlines the progress achieved so far in their protection. We believe that the General Assembly should pay greater attention to this problem. The mechanisms to be evolved under the Peacebuilding Commission should include rehabilitation and reintegration of all children affected by armed conflicts. Such measures should invariably take into account local values and traditions.

Mr. Chairman,

It is encouraging to note from the Report of the Secretary-General that 177 countries have incorporated the goals of "A World Fit for Children", which was adopted at the special session of the UN General Assembly in 2002, into their planning process by either developing national plans of action on children's issues or integrating the goals into mainstream national plans or both.

India is home to the largest child population in the world and is fully committed to the goals of 'A World Fit for Children'. India has ratified both the Optional Protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We share a deep concern about the status and welfare of children, who comprise 41% of the country's population. Elementary education is a Fundamental Right in India. The Government has resolved to increase public spending on education to at least 6% of GDP. At least half of this amount would be spent in the development of the primary and secondary education sectors. The *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, i.e. Universal Elementary Education Scheme, has been expanded to cover the entire country. There is a special emphasis on girls under this Scheme. The Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS] Programme launched in 1975 for achieving major national nutrition, health and education goals, has been expanded. This programme has now emerged as 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. The National Nutrition Mission launched in 1993 supplements the efforts of the ICDS programme.

We compliment Prof. Paulo Sergio Pinherio, the Independent Expert of the UNSG, for his detailed study on violence against children and for proposing concrete recommendations to prevent and respond to this issue. We agree with his central message that no violence against children can be justified, and all violence against children must be prevented.

Mr. Chairman,

I am happy to inform that with effect from 10 October 2006 a ban on employment of children under-14 years as domestic help or at eateries has come into force in India under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act. The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, noted that 'Our nation has solemnly pledged that children in our country are not engaged in any form of work at the cost of their right to education'. This measure is part of India's commitment to eliminate child labour in all its forms. We had banned in 1985 the employment of children below the age of fourteen years in factories, mines and hazardous environments. We believe that the strategy to eliminate child labour in all its forms recognizes that it is inextricably linked with poverty and illiteracy, and cannot be solved by legislation alone, and that a holistic, multi-pronged and concerted effort is needed. India is running a National Child Labour Project Scheme in 250 child labour endemic districts of the country. This is the largest world wide programme for withdrawal of child labour from the economic activities and their rehabilitation through special courses.

The National Policy of Action for Children adopted in 2005 commits to extending all rights to all children up to the age of 18 years, by encompassing child survival and development, child protection and child participation. The Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act passed by the Indian Parliament in January 2006 provides for speedy trial of offence against children or of violation of child's rights. A National Commission for Protection of Child's Rights and similar Commissions at the regional level would also be set up soon for better promotion and protection of child rights.

While numerous measures are being implemented in India to improve the lot of children, we are also conscious of the need to do a lot more to improve the overall status of the Indian child. The Prime Minister of India underlined that 'I dream of an India in which every child can go to school. An India in which no child goes hungry. An India in which all children have the opportunity to learn, to play, to be healthy and to live a life of dignity and self-respect.' It is to fulfilling this dream that India has dedicated itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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