



STATEMENT BY MR. PRASANNA ACHARYA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 66: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AT THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 18, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) for his reports under the Agenda item 66 on "Promotion and protection of the rights of children", and the report of the Special Representative of the UNSG on Children and Armed Conflict, and the report of the independent expert on violence against children.

Progress made so far in achieving the goals identified in the outcome of the 27th Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children titled "A World Fit for Children", has been rather unsatisfactory. While the under-five mortality has been reduced to less than 10 million in 2006, a significant number of countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, would not be in a position to meet the goal of two-thirds reduction by 2015, compared to the 1990 figures. Of the 2.2 billion children under the age of 15 in the world, an estimated 1 billion live in poverty. There has been considerable progress towards the goal of universal enrolment and gender disparity; however, major challenges persist regarding school attendance and quality of learning. The UNSG in his report rightly calls for a scaled-up response by Governments, increased commitments from the international community and stronger partnerships to achieve the identified goals.

A number of countries are integrating the goals of "A World Fit for Children" into their planning process. The need of the hour is to address the underlying causes of one-half of the world's children who live in miserable conditions. Apart from focussing attention on children's rights, there should be commensurate attention and support to children's developmental needs such as adequate and nutritious food together with civic amenities, basic health services and access to education. The achievement of targets in four major goal areas of the Special Session, namely promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS, would strongly reinforce the UN Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mr. Chairman,

The Report of the UNSG points to a lamenting decrease in the Official development assistance (ODA) for developing countries viz. from 0.33 percent of total donors' GNP in 2005 to 0.3 percent in 2006. Such a shortfall in aid flows, the UNSG asserts, would reduce finances needed to be invested in children as anticipated by the Outcome of the Special Session, thus affecting the timely achievement of the MDGs. We support the call by the UNSG to fill the financing gap – the difference between what developing countries need to invest to achieve the goals and what they can mobilize from their own resources –by raising the ODA volumes of developed countries.

We appreciate the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict in presenting concrete recommendations to improve protection and care of children affected by armed conflicts. The General Assembly should enhance its role in addressing protecting children's rights in armed conflict by examining the recommendations contained in the Report. We welcome the efforts of the Peace Building Commission in evolving mechanisms that provide for rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflicts.

Mr. Chairman,

India is committed to the development of every child, and ensuring his or her rights and protection in our country. It ratified the UN Convention on Rights of the Child and its two Protocols. India has been adopting an integrated approach to address the welfare of children, who comprise 41% of the country's population; the largest child population in the world. The largest early childhood development programme in the world is currently implemented in India under the Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS]. More than 5,400 projects extending services to over 41 million beneficiaries comprising largely children and pregnant and lactating mothers are covered under the ICDS.

India has a proactive stand on the issue of child protection and in creating a protective environment for children. Towards this end, India has undertaken several initiatives, notably a National Commission for Protection of Child's Rights has been set up in February 2007 to provide speedy trial of offence against children or of violation of child's rights, thus ensuring effective implementation of laws and programmes relating to children. This is an outcome of the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 2006. No violence against children can be justified, and all violence against children can and must be prevented. To complement the efforts of Prof. Paulo Sergio Pinherio, the UN Independent Expert, India has conducted its own nation-wide study on child abuse, in collaboration with UNICEF and civil society partners to ascertain the magnitude of the problem. We are currently in the process of taking further measures to suitably address violence against children in the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Universal Elementary Education Scheme (*Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*) in India has contributed significantly towards India moving towards realization of MDG 2 viz. to achieve universal primary education. The Scheme reduced out-of-school children from 32 million in 2001 to 7 million in 2006. It assisted in expanding elementary education, which is now a Fundamental Right in India. The government has resolved to increase public spending on education to at least 6% of the GDP with at least half of this amount earmarked for primary and secondary education sectors.

India remains strongly committed to the full eradication of all forms of child labour, beginning with its most exploitative and hazardous forms and moving on to its progressive and effective elimination. Our National Human Rights Commission and our legal system have been active on this issue. We are participants in the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. We believe that the strategy to eliminate child labour in all its forms recognizes that it cannot be solved by legislation alone, and that a holistic, multi-pronged and concerted effort is needed. The ban on employment in India of children under the age of 14 years as domestic help or at eateries under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act passed a year back marks an important milestone in this respect. We are now working towards evolving suitable legal frameworks for effective implementation of this Act. India is running the largest world wide programme to withdraw children from economic activities and to rehabilitate them under an expanded National Child Labour Project Scheme covering 14 States in the country.

India will work towards complete realisation of the goals of 'A World Fit for Children' as well as the related Millennium Development Goals.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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