



STATEMENT BY MR. ANIL KUMAR, SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND
CHILD DEVELOPMENT AT COMMEMORATIVE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING
DEVOTED TO THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOME OF THE SPECIAL SESSION
ON CHILDREN AT 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON DECEMBER 12, 2007

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Children,

We thank you for convening this commemorative high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the Special Session on Children. We also thank the UN Secretary-General for his report on this occasion.

The progress made so far in achieving the identified goals and targets in the outcome of the 27th Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children titled 'A World Fit for Children', is rather mixed. 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 also strongly reinforce the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Under-five mortality has been reduced to less than 10 million in 2006, nevertheless, a significant number of countries are unlikely to meet the goal of two-thirds reduction by 2015. Of the 2.2 billion children under the age of 15 in the world, an estimated 1 billion live in poverty. Progress towards the goal of universal enrolment and gender disparity is encouraging, however, major challenges persist regarding school attendance and quality of learning.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General has called for a scaled-up response by Governments, increased commitments from the international community and

stronger partnerships to achieve the identified goals. 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 is a lamentable development. It not only reduces finances available to the developing countries for investing in children, as anticipated by the Outcome of the Special Session, but would also adversely affect the timely achievement of the MDGs. We support the call by the UN Secretary General 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.

Mr. President,

India is committed to the development of every child and ensuring his or her rights and protection in our country. India has been adopting an integrated approach for the welfare of children, who comprise 42% of the country's population; the largest child population in the world. The National Charter for Children was adopted in February 2004, which is a statement of intent embodying the Government's agenda for development of children. Our achievements in respect of all indicators for children for the past decade, particularly since 2002, have been positive; we recognize many challenges remain in realizing all the goals and targets and are determined to pursue them with greater vigour and allocation of greater resources so that they are achieved in a timely manner.

A child budgeting review has been initiated for proper governance and accountability of programmes and schemes. The aggregate outlay for child specific schemes as a proportion of total Central Budget has been more than doubled from 2001 to 2006. 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. Public spending on health would be increased to 2-3% of the GDP in the next five years, focussing on primary health care.

The largest early childhood development programme in the world is currently implemented in India under the Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS] extending services to over 41 million beneficiaries comprising largely children and pregnant and lactating mothers are covered under the ICDS.

The Constitutional 86th Amendment Act of December 2002 made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. 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. It increased the net

enrolment ratio in primary education to 95% by 2005. The Scheme also reduced out-of-school children from 32 million in 2001 to 7 million in 2006.

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 for 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. An Integrated Child Protection Scheme is likely to be launched in near future. A Parliamentary Forum on Child Protection has been created. The Government is also currently in the process of taking further measures to suitably address violence against children in the country.

Mr. President,

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 progressively to its complete 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 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 is committed to promote healthy lives and combating HIV/AIDS, particularly those children who are infected or at a risk. In July 2007, we launched the first comprehensive National Policy on Children and AIDS in India. This policy proposes a universal approach in addressing the needs of all children affected by HIV/AIDS. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has developed a clear and effective response for every segment of the community, including children, to combat HIV/AIDS. India's first National Paediatric

Programme on HIV/AIDS was launched on 30th November 2006 to enhance coverage of Children Living with HIV/AIDS and providing them specific paediatric formulations. Paediatric drugs have been provided to Anti-retroviral Treatment centres in different part of the country.

In all our endeavours we are working closely with civil society organisations including NGOs, whose cooperation has been invaluable in fructifying our efforts.

We would like to commend the work of UNICEF on behalf of the world's children. UNICEF deserves our full support and cooperation in its efforts.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, India reiterates its commitment to ensuring the rights, protection and complete development of every child in the country. India will work towards complete and timely realisation of the goals of 'A World Fit for Children' as well as the related Millennium Development Goals.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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