

STATEMENT MR. DEREK O'BRIEN, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 65 - PROMOTION & PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN' AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 67TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 19, 2012

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representatives and the Special Rapporteur for their reports under this agenda item.

Mr. Chairman,

I come from India, where one in every five of the world's children lives. I come from India, where 400 million children and young people below the age of 18 live; this is larger than the population of America, Argentina and Australia put together. I come from India, which manufactures 40 per cent of vaccines used in universal immunization programs across the world, protecting small babies and little children from disease and death. I come from India, where investing in the future of our country's and our world's youngest citizens is recognized as not just an economic necessity but a moral imperative.

Mr. Chairman,

The Indian Constitution has several provisions providing for protection, development and welfare of children. These and the provisions of the National Policy for Children 1974 were subsequently updated and crafted in detail in the National Charter for Children adopted by the Government in 2004.

The National Charter for Children is a comprehensive document encompassing the following areas: health, education, protection from economic exploitation and all forms of abuse, protection of the girl child, protecting children with disabilities and the welfare of children of marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

A detailed Plan of Action was drawn up in 2005 focusing on four broad areas: child survival, child development, child protection and child participation. In India, we believe, that civil society needs to partner government in addressing children's issues.

Mr. Chairman,

Early childhood is the most crucial phase. This is when the foundations for physical, psychological, social and intellectual development are laid. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the flagship programme of the Government benefits 78 million children below the age of 6 in the area of nutrition, health and education.

Proper nutrition is essential for cognitive development of the young child. These measures include supplementary nutrition to bridge the caloric gap between the recommended intake and average intake of children in low income and disadvantaged communities; regular monitoring of the growth chart; and safeguarding in particular against vitamin A deficiency, to improve the nutritional and health status of children.

ICDS also covers these children with immunization, regular health check-ups and referral services as required as well as provides pre-school non-formal education to 37 million children in the age group of 3-6 years. The Scheme is now being universalised.

Several programmes are being implemented to address infant and child mortality. These include Universal Immunisation Programme, Integrated Management of Neonatal Childhood Illnesses, Total Sanitation Campaign, and the Reproductive and Child Health Programme.

I would in particular like to highlight the success of our Pulse Polio Immunization Programme in partnership with WHO, UNICEF and Rotary International that has led to the significant milestone of India being polio free in 2011.

The Indian Constitution provides for free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 years. As part of a public-private partnership, private schools reserve 25% of seats for children from economically weaker sections of society with budgetary support from the government.

Mr. Chairman,

Ending exploitation and violence against children is fundamental to ensuring a healthy future for every child. We have undertaken significant measures towards the creation of a protective environment for children.

To strengthen implementation of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, the government launched the Integrated Child Protection Scheme in 2009 to cover offences against children which are not presently addressed in the law, and to increase the safety net for the protection of children.

This scheme unified several existing schemes of child protection and has provided better understanding on children's protection issues beside generating interest among all stakeholders.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights was set up in 2007 . This was a significant step for speedy trial of offenders committing crimes against children and violating the rights of children.

The Government of India has recently notified a special law for the protection of children from sexual offences. We are also actively combating the trafficking of women and children.

The Government has taken several steps to provide family and community-based care arrangements for children deprived of parental care including sponsorship, kinship, foster care and adoption.

Mr. Chairman,

The eradication of child labour is a priority for the Government of India. We are strictly enforcing the ban on the employment of children under 14 years of age. At the same time, in recognition of the fact that this problem cannot be separated from its socio-economic circumstances, we are also implementing measures to improve the access to education, health and nutrition for children.

Mr. Chairman,

The girl child is one of the most vulnerable members of any society. I am particularly happy to be placing the statement less than a week after the UN observed 'Girl Child Day' on October 11th. India, you will be pleased to know, now observes January 24 as "National Girl Child Day". The occasion is used to generate awareness about the tremendous potential as well as to highlight the challenges faced by them.

The government has taken a number of steps to enhance the status of the girl child. Sex selective abortion and child marriage have been banned in India. Targeted interventions have led to almost full enrolment in primary grades of schooling and narrowing of gender gaps in middle and higher education.

Mr. Chairman,

Rabindranath Tagore, the poet from India and Bengal and the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, wrote about children in his most elegant and memorable work, Gitanjali. "Children," Tagore wrote, "are living beings - more living than grown-up people who have built shells of habit around themselves. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love."

The child is an instrumental stakeholder in the social contract. We have an obligation to provide a safe and enabling environment for their development.

Let me reaffirm our commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of our children and their children's children.

Mr. Chairman,

We wish to leave you with the words of Mahatma Gandhi, who had said, "If we wish to create a lasting peace, we must begin with children".

I thank you.

BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS