

PRESS RELEASE: NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD RIGHTS, NCPCR.
20 NOVEMBER 2007.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights had organized a National Conference on Child Rights, on 20th November, on the occasion of International Child Rights Day. 20th November is celebrated worldwide as Universal Children Day which is also known as International Child Rights Day. On this day the Members of International community including India recognized the fact that *“Child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection before as well as after Birth”*. Accordingly, on this day (20th November’07), they adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 under the aegis of UN. Both these Instruments are Charters of commitment of the world community to the children for ensuring their right to survival and development, food, nutrition and health, education and recreation, identity, name and nationality, family and familiar environment, protection from neglect, maltreatment, exploitation, abuse and trafficking, etc.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), which has been set up by Government of India as a Statutory Body in March’2007 to protect, promote and defend child rights in the country, had organized this event, which was attended by officers of concerned Government Departments, Child Rights Organisations and Civil Society Groups.

The Chief Guest on this occasion was Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of the UPA. The presidential address was delivered by the Minister for Women and Child, Smt. Renuka Chowdhry. The Chairperson of the NCPCR, Dr Shantha Sinha welcomed the participants. Children from SOS village Faridabad rendered the welcome song.

Delivering the welcome address, Smt. Shantha Sinha (Chairperson, NCPCR) shared the role of India in establishing the Universal Child Rights Day: Shri Krishna Menon, while addressing the Ninth Session of the UN General Assembly requested the UN to set aside one day as a “World Children’s Day” to observe worldwide fraternity and understanding between children”. His recommendation was accepted and by resolution 835(IX) of the UN General Assembly, 20 November was declared as Universal Child Rights Day. Dr. Sinha said that we should have a “A culture that welcomes and celebrates birth of every child and grieves over the loss of life of an infant and her mother has to comprise the should of our nation. There has to be a pervasive atmosphere that embraces a child to get breastfed, have adequate nourishment, safe shelter and protection and pre-school....There have been tremendous strides towards realizing this vision, with India having the largest institutional net in terms of anganwadi centres, schools, hostels, ashram-shalas, immunisation, and nutrition programmes...” Commenting on child labour she said, “An uncompromising stand on abolishing all forms of child labour and provision for inclusive education within a rights based perspective” is needed.

Smt. Renuka Chowdhury (Minister, Women and Child Development) in her presidential address commenting on child labour said, “Children shouldn’t be working. We should be working, so that they can enjoy their childhood”. In the context of child protection she mentioned that, “the Child Abuse study conducted by the Ministry shows how unsafe our children are.” The study has

revealed that one out of every two children in India have been potentially been victims of abuse. She went on to say that the, “Conference is a celebration for all that has been done, and a wake-up call for all that needs to be done....The Ministry and the Government of India pledge our continuous endeavours to ensure that every child will have a happy childhood.”

Smt. Sonia Gandhi began by saying that, there is “no greater gift bestowed upon us than our children; and there is no greater responsibility than to answer their care and protect....Upon us lies the responsibility to put in place policies that will ensure their future.” She went on to say that “one of the greatest failings of our society today is that children become victims of violence and are subjected to trafficking and abuse, often at the hands of the very institutions that are meant to protect them.” Commenting on the importance of schooling she said that, the “essence of childhood is joy, happiness and most importantly schooling and learning....We must create school environments where their creativity and imagination is not stifled but given full freedom of expression”. Further she said that the, “issues of children are inextricably linked with the problems that afflict our society at large- problems of gender inequality, social injustice, of poverty, hunger and disease. Any society that aspires for the welfare, progress and development of mankind must first work for the well-being of its children....Every child is exceptional. Each one has some special gift or ability. Each needs encouragement to grow and develop. It is for us to create that nurturing and enabling environment that will allow our children to grow into responsible, caring citizens who will enjoy a bright future for themselves and contribute meaningfully to nation-building.” She ended by reiterating the importance of developing community responsibility of children, she said, “The community as a whole must want for all its children what each one of us parents want for our own child-only then can a nation and a society fulfill its obligations to the coming generations.”

The second session was called “Children speak, adults listen”. Children from 8 homes presented their views on child rights through the medium of street plays. Don Bosco presented a play on the “child alone”, which depicted how children’s rights are being violated every day.

This was followed by a play by The Salaam Balak trust called “*Main bhi ek baccha hun*” (Even I am a child), about a small boy called Chunnu who wants to study and play, but is forced to work, and his experience when he runs away to Delhi, working in a dhaba, working with a thief, being caught by the police.

Children from Butterflies presented a play entitled “*Gaddha*”- on societal response to children’s problems. This was followed by a skit by children from Prayas, who depicted how children are led into a life of crime.

The children from Bal Sahyog, presented a play entitled “*Khunkar Singh ka durbar*”, about substance abuse. Deepalya presented a play “Miss Beam’s school” about children with disabilities and the need to empathise with them. This was followed by a dance by children from Butterflies and a play by children from Aman Biradari called “*Patri par ek zindagi*”

The afternoon session comprised reflections on various child rights issues by experts. The speakers included Prof. Abhijit Sen (Member, Planning Commission) who spoke about “planning for children in the eleventh plan process”. He highlighted that the 11th Plan is aiming

to achieve “inclusive growth”. He also mentioned that the, “Planning Commission wants the ‘right to education’ to be notified through a central legislation”. Prof. Muchkund Dubey (People’s Campaign for Common School Systems.) spoke about the need for a common school system, which would ensure a minimum quality of education to all our children. He mentioned that “No developed country has become developed without a common school system. And this Common School System is anathema to our policy makers.” Commenting on the numbers of children who are out of school he said that, “40 % of our children are out of school. Educational Exclusion is the root to all exclusion because it results in exclusion from freedom of thought, expression... Can we bring about an inclusive society while allowing such exclusion?”

Dr. Kiran Bedi (Director General, Bureau of Police Research and Development) commenting on the provision for ‘Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU)’ in every police station, requested NCPCR to enquire about the existence of these SJPUs, and also “direct the state police directorates to publish the names of all SJPUS on their websites.” Further she said that it is important for women police officials to be part of SJPUs, but this is not mandate in the rules. NCPCR must raise this issue. If women police officials are not available in every police station, then link-ups with children’s NGOs should be made. Further she requested, “NCPCR must organize a conference of DGPs of all states and police trainers, which would include a sensitization programme on child rights.” Simultaneously, the “good work of police officers and departments must also be recognized and felicitated.” Swami Agnivesh gave a rousing address on bonded child labour, and the need to urgently address this issue. He said that child labour has a direct link to adult unemployment. If 10 crore children are in the labour force, then that means 10 crore adults do not have work. Mrs Prema Cariappa (Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and Member-Convenor, Parliamentary Forum for Children) spoke about the work being done by Parliamentary Forum on Children.

Shri. P. Chidambaram (Minister for Finance), in his valedictory address noted that, “child rights has a long history of perseverance and finally recognition.” He stressed upon the point that “there are a few things if done right, would immediately guarantee other rights of the children, such as the provision of a quality education up to the secondary level to all children, along with immunisation, Mid-day Meal Scheme and activity –based learning. The government has placed highest focus on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, immunisation and Mid-day meal scheme.” The government is working towards making these provisions universal and effective. He said that, “we must find a way of making ICDS effective too. With ICDS and Mid-day meal scheme a large proportion of children can be secured their rights”. He further said that the performance of any government scheme is different in different places- some places are functioning well, whereas some places are abysmally bad. “The Central government does not have discriminatory practices, where one state is given preference over another. Equal consideration is given to all”. This is because, “the persons we elect to responsible positions of village administration, corporation, assembly and parliament are not responsible enough”. He went on to say that, “people have neglected their basic duty of electing responsible people.” He further said that, “money is not the problem”. We must pressurize the administration and elected representatives to make correct use of the money.

Mrs. Sandhya Bajaj (Member, NCPCR) delivered the vote of thanks, demanding that ‘every day should be celebrated as child rights day’, and ended on a rousing note.

