

*Agenda Item 110: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children*

*Statement by Hon'ble Mr. S. Ramachandra Reddy, MP on October 12, 2000*

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Madam Chairperson,

UNICEF's "The State of the World's Children, 2000" puts matters poignantly: "The world has more children living in poverty than it had 10 years ago. It is more unstable and more violent than it was in 1990 when the leaders at the World Summit pledged to reach 27 goals for children and women by the year 2000." Patterns of poverty have changed dramatically in the last decade with the poor further impoverished and those on the margins of poverty falling inexorably within its trap. There are 1.2 billion of the world living in abject poverty, one in every five persons, including more than 600 million children. That, in a situation of growing wealth, but for a few.

Change is not an impossibility. If only a small fraction of the \$ 30 trillion global economy were diverted to international development cooperation, most developing nations could meet the requirement of basic services which is crucial to the healthy development of children and for social development. The Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children in 2001 should serve as a platform for greater international development cooperation to secure the growth and development of the 600 million children of the world living in abject poverty. This increasing incidence of child poverty has yet to find resonance in our debates. We are, therefore, pleased that the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Olara Ottunu in our dialogue session yesterday confirmed that poverty, particularly, child poverty and its relationship with children being involved in armed conflict will find attention in his future reports to this Committee and other bodies.

This year has witnessed two significant developments in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child through the adoption of the Optional Protocols on children in armed conflict and on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. We believe that these Protocols will strengthen our collective effort to protect children.

The "Report of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict" which was discussed in the Security Council in July this year has now been presented to this Committee as a GA document. It made a number of recommendations to the Council, even though very few of them have anything even remotely to do with the maintenance of peace and security. All of us deplore the tragic impact of conflict on children, but the argument that this has implications for peace and security is not tenable.

The actions we take on this Report should be clearly thought out and pragmatic. Unfortunately, the recommendations are not. For example, Recommendation 4 asks for the acceptance of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol by armed groups. This is desirable, but armed groups obey no laws. Some might offer to sign on, in the hope that this will give them the legitimacy which they crave and which they should be denied. None can be trusted to implement an agreement, and unlike governments, cannot be held accountable. The rebels in Sierra Leone are a case in point. Afghanistan under the Taliban shows that Conventions or Protocols have no meaning for those determined to

abuse children; in Afghanistan, schools and seminaries are misused to instill in children hatred and intolerance. These children become cannon fodder for armed and terrorist groups that threaten the very fabric of plural and democratic societies. Will these purveyors of death respect the Optional Protocol ?

Another example is Recommendation 6, which urges member states “to make any political, diplomatic, financial, material and military assistance for state or non-state parties to armed conflict contingent on compliance with international standards that protect children in armed conflict. Is that an argument for legitimizing armed assistance to non-state actors by member states? Or is it that, armed groups that kill persons or allow children to kill persons above the age of 18, will qualify for military assistance from member states. That would be a sure recipe for anarchy.

Madam Chairperson,

The report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission of Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is interesting. Strangely, however, the report does not contain even a passing reference to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. On the other hand, her interest in the “Global Compact” stands out. We feel that, even though the “Compact” may be high profile, it is best left to inter-governmental negotiations in the General Assembly for which we have an agenda item in the General Assembly this year.

In her report the Special Rapporteur includes a report, given to her by an NGO, about the smuggling of children from Nepal to India. She does not seem to have vetted this information, and she seems to be unaware both of the nature of the problem and the steps being taken to tackle it. Most of the victims of this cross-border traffic which regrettably takes place are women, not children. My government is doing everything possible to stop this. Regionally, the countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have agreed on a draft Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially in Women and Children which we hope will be adopted and ratified soon.

The Department of Women and Child Welfare in India is active in both preventive as well as re-integration programme of children who have been trafficked or drawn into prostitution. A Plan of Action to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and children was adopted in 1998 and is currently under implementation. The Plan details responsibilities of various government institutions, in collaboration with civil society, for prevention of trafficking, awareness generation and social mobilization alongside health care services, child care, education, housing and civic amenities. It also includes economic empowerment of trafficked women and girls as well as their rehabilitation. Legal reforms and reforms in law enforcement along with strengthening of institutional machinery and mechanisms is also under implementation under the Plan. NGOs are full participants in these endeavours. A copy of the Plan of Action is kept at the back of the room for interested delegates. In addition, India is committed to concerted action against the consequences of poverty on children. We have initiated steps to ratify the ILO Convention on worst forms of child labour and our initial report was considered by the Committee on the Right of the Child early this year.

In paragraph 47 of the report, the Special Rapporteur mentions an organisation called 'State Management Agency' carrying out a survey in three towns of the Indian state of Kerala while highlighting some of the results of the survey as a negation of the inextricable link between poverty and forced prostitution. In a nation of a billion, results of a survey of about a 1000 people cannot be quoted as a challenge to the traditional causes for the entry of children into prostitution. Anyone would agree that a much broader sample survey is required than that. The Special Rapporteur also reports that the survey recommends an action plan to rescue children and prostitution including protection and prevention and strengthening of family relationships. As I mentioned before, a nationwide action plan is already in operation and we are certain that pockets of child prostitution as well as trafficking will be effectively combated. I may add that the Special Rapporteur on violence against women has been invited to visit India and she would be doing so shortly. One of the areas that she would be looking into is trafficking in women and girls. We are certain that she would have a fruitful visit.

Madam Chairperson,

The future of humanity are the children of the world. They must, therefore, live in peace and security and with full dignity and without want. This is what we should dedicate ourselves to, if our common humanity is to prosper without barriers or fetters.