

**STATEMENT BY MR. A.K. BHATTACHARJEE, MINISTER, ON AGENDA ITEM 115 PROMOTION
AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (THIRD COMMITTEE)
ON OCTOBER 29, 2001**

Mr. Chairman,

Five million children still die before they are five. 77% of these deaths are due to preventable causes. More than 20% of children in developing countries, in the primary school age, do not attend school. 10 million or more lost either or both parents due to HIV/AIDS. 177 million children are stunted by malnutrition. These chilling numbers come from UNICEF's report on the "State of the World's Children, 2001"; well over a decade after the "First Call for Children".

Mr Chairman,

There is no one reason for this continuing tragedy, but if there is one factor that is responsible more than any other, it is the dwindling resources at the disposal of developing countries to tackle a problem of such enormous proportions. The report on the "World Social Situation" recalls that the share of global GDP of the developing countries which constitute 70% of the world's population, continued to fall rapidly in the last 10 years and is now a meagre 20%. At the same time, the process of globalisation limits or weakens the ability of governments in developing countries to take independent or affirmative action, particularly in the social field. Thus, it has become much harder for them to implement a rights based approach to human development. We found a grudging acceptance of this, when the Committee on the Rights of the Child which examined India's report last year, acknowledged that: "*...the task facing India in meeting the needs of all children under its jurisdiction presents enormous challenges, not least in the economic and social fields.*" Global corporate capital has not come forth to supplement the shrinking capacity of governments. There are no corporate "best practices" in the creation of schools, affordable health care or even in the provision of educational instruments, including, cheap text books. We would like to see global partnerships evolve to take on this challenge, but so far they have not!

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the rights of children have to be seen in an inter-generational context. An early start in life that sustains the full growth and development of the child and enables the adult to fully attain his or her potential is vital. Children, therefore, are our first concern and priority. We recognise that literacy, particularly from early childhood, is the key to the implementation of this inter-generational approach. Despite scarcity of resources,

a law was recently enacted in India to make primary education compulsory and free. We have also begun work towards establishing a National Commission on Children which will help attain the goal of the full and complete development of children.

Mr Chairman,

India remains strongly committed to the full eradication of all forms of child labour wherever it might exist, 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 International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the ILO. While taking effective measures against child labour, it has been our basic premise that children involved in labour should not be forced into the more hazardous informal sector and as a result, suffer graver consequences. In the steps that we have taken to tackle the problem, we have kept all related issues in view – the developmental, the social and the legal.

Mr Chairman,

We appreciate the path-breaking work of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict. His recommendations on reaching out to children, reintegrating children affected by armed conflict and, most importantly, taking into account local values and traditions in activities related to alleviating the plight of children in or after armed conflict, are important. However, those who seek to promote their own agendas either through armed conflict or terrorism, know no rules. They use children, as they use others, without a scruple. Obtaining from them 'commitments' that can hardly be monitored, let alone enforced, perhaps, lulls us into a false sense of security. There, of course, are no easy answers here.