

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD RIGHTS VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Mr. Mustafa Nawaz khokhar, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights

Ms. Jahanara Manzoor Wattoo, Goodwill Ambassador for Orphan Children and SAIEVAC (South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children) Advisor to SAARC

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a real pleasure for me to be presented with an opportunity to contribute in the efforts of deliberating upon a challenge which concerns us all - "Violence against children"- a challenge from which no country or region is safe today. Violence against children knows no boundaries of religion, culture, and even social status. In every country of the world there are children who continue to face abuse, discrimination and violence in their homes, educational institutions, care and justice institutions, and workplaces in various forms. Sometimes such violence is tacitly allowed by lax national laws or maybe rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. Unfortunately, in Pakistan alone, more than 2000 cases of violence against children were reported from different parts of the country in the first six months of the current year alone.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We should never lose sight of the fact that Children are the hope of our future and need to be protected and nurtured in order to shape the world as a harmonious whole. It is the children who complete our world, our lives as parents; they complete a family, a society and all the social systems therein. They are the strength of any nation as its future but also are the most vulnerable sections of society till they are educated and trained to perform a useful role in the society.

It is common knowledge that children are impressionistic and impeccably receptive. Therefore, it needs to be realised that the repercussions of any form of violence on children can be far reaching and even continue throughout their lives leading to the disruption of nervous system itself or in different forms of social, emotional and cognitive impairments.

It is a sad reality that economic difficulties and reduced social spending by many governments around the world have placed many restrictions on children and has lead to several forms of violence, and children have rarely any recourse to effective remedy. Moreover, there is insufficient understanding and knowledge of the impact and incidence of violence against children on their development.

However it is heartening to see that succeeding the initial effort in form of the "The UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children" a change has been witnessed in form of international acknowledgment of such violence as a 'global scourge' that needs 'urgent attention'. Efforts are being made by governments and international organizations to address this issue with a staunch belief that violence against children is preventable. It has resulted in tangible efforts by the governments all over the globe to develop strategies aimed at

effectively preventing and combating all forms of violence against children, outlining steps that need to be taken for effective prevention, protection, intervention and treatment, of such issues of violence.

On the regional level too efforts are underway to increase awareness among the masses about this social dilemma. In the South Asian Region, recently there was South Asia Follow up on Regional Consultation on the UN Study on Violence Against Children which was attended by delegates from all the SAARC countries. Various workshops and seminars have been hosted to increase awareness in the SAARC countries.

Pakistan is desirous to play a leading role in the region for ending violence against children with the aim to make Pakistan a child friendly nation, besides strengthening regional efforts for ending violence against children.

Under the article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan, all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse are stressed upon, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Pakistan has not only ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but has also ratified optional protocols, which focus on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Pakistan is also a party to the SAARC convention on regional arrangements for promotion of child welfare in South Asia.

It is true that the States bear the primary responsibility for preventing and responding to violence against children but civil society groups and individual citizens also have important roles to play as violence is a problem that calls for a multi-sectoral response, especially when most of the cases are not reported because children are afraid due to the stigma frequently attached to reporting of such violence.

We must realize that Violence against children is a major threat to global development and our aim to reach the Millennium Development Goals. We will not achieve universal primary education unless children are safe in school. The spread of HIV/AIDS will not be halted until we also stop the violence against girls that helps to fuel it. We cannot propagate gender equality until child abuse is prevented.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Here, I would like to share with you that BISP has launched the first ever and the largest initiative 'Waseela e Taleem' (co-responsibility cash transfer) for its beneficiaries. Under the initiative, our beneficiaries will be given incentives for enrolling their children in primary schools in line with the UN's MDG of universal primary education. Currently about 9 million children of 5-12 years age group of the poorest class remain out of school and Waseela e Taleem aims at enrollment of approximately 4 million children in the next four years. More children in schools means a better future for them and I do hope that this leads to reduction in incidents of violence against children in our society.

Ladies and gentlemen

It is now well understood that we are in the midst of a crisis. Our nation is at war against a network of violence and hatred where the enemy is bent upon sapping our confidence, burgeoning our fear that Pakistan's decline as a state is inevitable, that the next generation must not be able to cast its glance above the ground. I say to you that the challenges we face are real and they are serious. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But we need to pool in the wisdom from other countries, international organizations and such platforms to derive concrete and measureable targets for the future; and indulge in collective efforts to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age where no child is afraid to go to school, walk freely in the street and aspire to be an effective member of a healthy society.

And let me remind all of us present here, failure in this multi faceted war is not an option. May Allah Bless Pakistan. Thank You