

Statement of the Leader of Country Delegation at the 52nd Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva Considering Pakistan's 3rd and 4th Consolidated Periodic Reports on implementation of UNCRC, 28th September 2009

Madam Chairperson and honorable members of the Committee

It is my privilege to present Pakistan's 3rd and 4th consolidated periodic reports on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These Reports have been prepared under the supervision of a high level multi-sectoral National Steering Committee comprising of relevant line ministries, provincial governments, NGOs and UN Agencies. It is the result of a detailed participatory process that extended for over a year. Additional and updated information on specific issues raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, was also timely forwarded to the Committee. Today, we are pleased to share with you the progress attained.

Legislation\Policy

2. Since our last report, Pakistan has crossed a number of milestones to bring our laws and policies in conformity with the CRC. Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2009; National Commission on the Rights of the Children Bill, 2009, and the National Child Protection Policy have been prepared in consultation with stakeholders and submitted to the Cabinet for approval. The approval is expected next month after which the Bills will be presented before the Parliament.

3. By promulgating the Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2009, a child friendly and protective environment will be created. The perpetrators will be brought to justice under various sections inserted in the

Pakistan Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure. The number of crimes against children is expected to decrease as the Bill calls for harsher penalties for the offences against children. Child pornography and child sexual abuse have been defined and criminalized with severe penalties. It also defines and criminalizes internal trafficking of children in Pakistan.

4. The Federal Government is also supporting a Private Members Bill, namely the Charter of Child Rights Bill, 2009, in the Parliament. The Bill has been drafted in the light of the provisions of the UNCRC. The Provincial Governments are also in the process of setting up child protection systems in accordance with the UNCRC.

5. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2004, which criminalize offences committed in the name or on the pretext of "honour"; Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance, 2006, which allows bail for women held on various charges, and Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006 which provide relief and protection to women against misuse and abuse of law and to prevent their exploitation, are major achievements for protection of women's rights and elimination of violence against women. Two Bills, titled "Protection against Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2009" and "Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2009" have been introduced in the Parliament after approval of the Cabinet, to address the issue of sexual harassment of women at workplace in the public and private sectors. The "Domestic Violence against Women and Children (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2009 has also been introduced in the Parliament to provide legal mechanism for protection of victims of domestic violence.

6. Furthermore, to ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, consultation process has been completed. Consensus has been achieved and legal review is underway.

Education

7. Pakistan, like many other developing countries, faces challenges in improving its education sector although the performance, over the years, remains somewhat deficient in access, quality and relevance. The emergence and continued presence of parallel systems of education i.e. public, private and madrassah education apparently violates the principles of uniformity of educational provisions. As you are aware, there is a historical context in which these systems have evolved. Efforts are being made to blend these systems with the national education system in the form of a common curricula and standards.

8. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has committed to raise expenditure on education from present 2.5% to 4% and raising it gradually to 7% by 2015. This commitment has been reflected in the National Education Policy, 2009. It is worth mentioning that despite colossal challenges Pakistan faces, the primary enrolment has risen from 15.093 million in 2003 to 17.233 million in 2008 (14% increase) and drop outs have been brought down from 50% in 2003 to 35% in 2008. The Education Policy addresses governance and capacity issues to reduce commitment and implementation gaps thereby paving the way for achieving the target of universal primary education in the shortest possible time.

Health

9. Pakistan ranks 136 out of 177 countries with an HDI of 0.551. The country is classified as low-income with 84.6 percent of its population earning less than US\$2 per day. This has resulted in poor human development, especially among women and children of rural areas.

10. In spite of this, the government of Pakistan has intensified efforts with focus on maternal and child health to achieve the set targets in MDG 4. The interventions include control of childhood tuberculosis, malaria and the six vaccine preventable diseases, in addition to the control of blindness and prevention of parent to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. It is worth noting that there has been much progress during the last decade in terms of maintaining the IMR at 73, slight increase in the proportion of 1 year old children immunized against measles to 60%, significant reduction in the maternal mortality ratio to 280 and doubling of the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel to 40%.

11. Assessments conducted indicate a high level of willingness in the general public to accept vaccination. The Government of Pakistan has developed a strong communication strategy focusing on the gaps in previous campaigns. The strategy focuses on achieving polio eradication, attaining 95% measles campaign coverage, and strengthening routine immunization.

12. In order to protect the rights of people living with HIV, a bill on HIV 2009 has been formulated and will be sent to the Cabinet shortly. Similarly, for safe blood transfusion services in the country, Blood Transfusion Authorities (BTAs) at Federal and Provincial levels have been established.

Protection

13. In the area of protection, the Federal Government has set up a Child Complaint Cell, in the Federal Ombudsman's Secretariat to redress grievances of the children. Child Complaint Cells are being established at the Ombudsman's Secretariat at provincial level as well.

14. The Child Protection Management Information System (CPMIS) has been established in the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) with the financial and technical support from UNICEF. The system covers areas of child protection like child sexual exploitation, juvenile justice, child trafficking, family and alternative care, and violence against children.

15. Pakistan is also implementing the National Policy and Plan of Action to Combat Child Labour since 2000, which aims at progressive elimination of child labour; immediate withdrawal of children from worst forms of child labour; preventing entry of under-age children into the labour market through universalization of primary education and family empowerment; and rehabilitation of working children through non-formal education, pre-vocational training and skill development.

16. The Government has made lot of efforts to create enabling environment for elimination of child labour through raising awareness among the stakeholders and masses, improvement in legislation, mobilizing resources for child labour programmes and institution building. Child Labour Units have been established at the federal and provincial levels to exclusively run and monitor child labour programme through out the country.

17. Recently, the National Time Bound Programme (NTBP) for Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) has been devised which aims at elimination of worst forms of child labour from the country within a period of eight years, 2008-2016. The NTBP adopts holistic approach to coordinate and monitor WFCL Programmes at the district level.

18. In view of the number of problems being faced by our children like, poverty, rural family set up, low literacy rate, low social sector development coupled with food and energy crisis, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has been initiated by the Government of Pakistan with an initial allocation of Rs.34 billion (US \$ 425 million approximately) for the year 2008-09. This is the third largest allocation in the total budget and is 0.3 percent of the GDP for the year 2008-09. The Programme aims at covering around 15% of the entire population, which constitutes 40% of the population below the poverty line.

19. Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) is also making significant contribution towards poverty reduction through its various poorest- of -the- poor, focused services by providing assistance to destitute, widow, orphan, invalid, infirm and other needy persons irrespective of their gender, caste, creed and religion.

20. The Government of Pakistan has also approved a pilot project of Conditional Cash Transfer in the Child Support Program. This programme aims at offering additional cash transfers to the ultra poor families inducing them to send their children to school in the age bracket of 5 to 12 years. This is because of low primary enrolment and high dropout rates among the poorest, who are the target group in this program. Currently, PBM is implementing this project in eleven districts. In the next phase, 29 more districts will be covered. Similarly,

Pakistan Baitul Mal provides Rs. 10,000/- to a family which has one handicapped child and Rs. 25,000/- to a family which has two or more. This financial assistance is provided on annual basis.

21. The Government of Pakistan has recently approved an insurance scheme providing cover to the children with multiple disabilities or are severely disable. Under this scheme, the Government will pay premium for such children who, after few years, will receive a reasonable monthly stipend for their basic needs including hiring an attendant.

War on Terror

22. Pakistan is a front line Sate in the war against terrorism with a great loss of precious human lives and damage to basic services infrastructure. The estimated cost of the 'War on Terror' to Pakistan is billions of dollars.

23. A rehabilitation centre known as 'Sabawoon' (Morning Light) has been established to look after the young men. A team of specialist doctors is dedicated for this purpose.

24. To supplement these efforts, the Government has established Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Trust with the initial seed money of 100 million for education and rehabilitation of the children affected by terrorism and law enforcement operations.

Reforms in FATA

25. President of Pakistan has announced major reforms in the administrative and judicial make up of the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA). Amongst others, these reforms provide for exclusion of women and children from the Collective Responsibility Clause of the FCR.

Regional Initiatives

26. At the regional level, Pakistan hosted the regional consultation on UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children in 2005 and set up in 2006, the Regional Secretariat of the South Asia Ministerial Forum for ending violence against children

Madam Chairperson

27. We have placed on record some of the achievements of Pakistan in the field of child rights. This, in spite of the fact, that for last 30 years we have been fighting a protracted war, first against occupation of Afghanistan and now against extremism and terrorism. Pakistan has been fighting this war for its own sake and also for the sake of the world. We have suffered losses to the extent of billions and billions of dollars not to mention profoundly negative effects on our society and polity which cannot be quantified. We have lost about 3000 soldiers and officers in the war and hundreds have been injured, many of whom will not be able to return to normal lives. About 2.2 million Afghan refugees are still living in Pakistan. Then, in last few years, Pakistan also suffered from global economic and financial crisis which pushed around 12-14 million people to the rank of poor. This means the poverty increased from 22.3% of the population to 30-35% within a period of 4 years. A developing country like Pakistan, with its own myriad problems, is fighting relentlessly to overcome these colossal problems. The damage to its infrastructure is incalculable. Compounding this problem has been our exploding population which now stands at more than 164 million. Of this, approximately, 70 million are children.

28. Despite these formidable challenges, Pakistan has demonstrated its commitment to the promotion and protection of child rights. Pakistan attaches great importance to the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and, as narrated, has done a great deal to comply with them.

29. We continue to face challenges in eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, strengthening services for children, providing comprehensive safety nets to them and effective implementation of child related laws. But, then, we are a vibrant nation and, we shall overcome.

30. Let me assure you, Madam Chairperson, we are committed to work for the promotion of rights of children; which is not only our religious, moral and international obligation but also an indispensable investment to secure our future in partnership with regional and international community. We would remain at the forefront of pursuing the child rights agenda. We are honour bound to be part of the global efforts to ensure a better and safe future for our children.

I thank you, Madam Chairperson. We look forward to a valuable and educative session and would greatly appreciate guidance of the Committee to further improve our performance.

