

Madam Chair and Distinguished Members,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee for giving me the opportunity to say a few introductory words on the initial Bangladesh report on the Optional protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child prostitution and Child pornography. We greatly value the works of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The views and suggestions of the Committee help us in formulating our national strategies to improve the rights of the child in our country. We hope today's interaction would be constructive and fruitful in promoting and protecting the rights of the child - the most vulnerable segment of our society.

Madam Chair,

Bangladesh is committed to the well-being of the children of today, who will create our future tomorrow. Despite our scarce human and financial resources, we are trying our best to ensure enabling environment for enjoyment of child's rights. On this commitment, we have ratified the CRC and the Two Optional Protocols. Coming a long way to Geneva to engage in a dialogue bears the demonstration that the Government of Bangladesh is committed to this treaty body.

Let me now give you some general perspective on the situation with regard to the Child Rights in Bangladesh. It will not be fare to examine the situation of rights of the child without taking into account overall socio-economic context of a particular country. Poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment are at the root of denial of many rights including the rights of the child. We have made some progress in the area of poverty reduction over the last two decades. Access to primary education has increased steadily. Enrolment rate has also improved. This has happened due to increase in Government's budgetary allocation for

education. Making primary education free, massive scholarship programme and girls stipend programme have contributed to this progress. There has been steady decline in the infant mortality rate. I can go on with the list of positive development but for the sake of brevity, I do not intend to do that. A great deal of these is already reflected in the initial Report of the Optional Protocol as well as subsequent answers to questions that we provided to the esteemed Committee.

On the regional arrangements, may I inform you that within the South Asian region, we have increased cooperation at the regional level. Bangladesh has ratified the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children, the SAARC Convention on Child Welfare, and the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements on the Protection of Child Welfare in South Asia. All these initiatives will have positive impact on the overall realization of the rights of the child and reinforce national endeavors.

Madam Chair,

Coming to the specifics of the Optional protocol, I would like to tell you that the sale of children and child pornography are not widespread in Bangladesh. We hardly have any case of sale of children despite widespread poverty in the society. Child pornography is also extremely rare, thanks to the social stigma and religious taboo. It may grow as a phenomenon in the future for example, with the ever-increasing growth of Internet use. Perhaps we have to take some pre-cautionary measures specific to child pornography. For the moment we are more concerned about the pressing issues, such as child prostitution.

We do have a problem with underage girls victim of child prostitution. The Government is well aware of the situation. A remarkable progress has been achieved in putting the necessary framework to combat women trafficking. A Police Monitoring Cell at the police HQs in the

capital has been established to collect information regarding human trafficking specially trafficking in women and children. There is an inter-Ministerial Committee headed by the M/O of Home Affairs to review the progress that involves all stakeholders including NGOs. At the field level, there are Committees headed by local administrators like DCs and UNOs to monitor cases of women and children trafficking, repression, acid throughing etc. The Committees send monthly reports to M/O Women and Children Affairs

We are aware that appropriate legal measures must be in place to protect the children against criminal acts. With this in view, the Government has amended some laws and enacted new laws. For example, the Birth and Death Registration Act 2004, considered as a savior in the area of child protection. The Mines (Amendment) Acts 2004, the Court Wards (Amendment) Act 2004, etc. were revised to bring in conformity with the CRC. The country experiences incidents related to acid throughing, especially to the girls and young women. To tackle this menace, the Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002 and the Acid Control Act 2002 were promulgated.

Madam Chair,

The Government of Bangladesh is striving to achieve the objectives of the Optional Protocol through its available means. But I must admit, we have a mile to go. And we are committed to carry forward our works in cooperation and coordination with all stakeholders. International support and assistance would be necessary as the country like ours cannot alone achieve everything. In view of recent decline of international assistance, this is more important.

With this I would like to conclude my initial remarks and we look forward to your comments and questions. Thank you.