

Are we denying the Rights of Children?

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"Right" is the legal and moral entitlement to obtain or refrain from obtaining an action, in civil society. Rights are human constructs, created by society and enforced by the government. The constraints and obligations are placed on the individuals or groups.

It is not necessary that a right should be understood by the holder of that right; these rights may be recognized on behalf of another, such as children's rights. However, right must be understood by someone in order to have its legal and moral existence. Healthy and nurturing environment is the prerequisite for rearing a healthy child. Protection of children requires safeguarding children from all kinds of exploitation, abuse, maltreatment, neglect, abandonment, and discrimination. The responsibility lies with all individual within the society, Do children have rights? Who decides the basis and contents of the rights on legal or moral ground? This has to be done with unanimous consent at global level. After deliberating on the issue of children rights for 10 years, the United Nation (UN) reached a unanimous decision regarding Children Rights. UN adopted the resolution in Nov. 20, 1989 .In 1990 the world summit was held, all the member states present signed and ratified the CRC.¹Pakistan was among the countries which has signed and ratified the CRC in 1990 for implementing it in accordance with Pakistan's Law and Islamic Ideology.

CRC provides a universal standard on the rights of the world's children. It contains 54 articles and deals with 4 major areas of children.(1)Survival, (2) Development, (3) Protection and (4) Participation. Survival, includes the right to live, registration at birth, preservation of identity. Development involves, right to education, health, standard of living, social security, leisure and recreation. In protection , articles included are concerned with protection of lost/missing children, children in labor, sexual abuse & exploitation, sale, trafficking, abduction, drug abuse,

armed conflict, refugee children, neglect, torture and juvenile injustice.¹ Participation is the right to express opinion, freedom of thoughts, freedom of associations, protection of privacy and access to information.

It is the obligation of every state, civil society and parents to ensure the implementation of CRC in every country to give the children their right to survival, development, protection or participation. By ratifying the convention Pakistan is bound to the provisions in the CRC and is now answerable to the International Community.

According to CRC a child should have an access to adequate health care, medical assistance education and health promotion.

Are we able to provide protection to our children? Let us look at the situation of children in Pakistan. Children comprises of almost 50 percent of the population of Pakistan. More than 500,000 children under five years of age, die every year, i.e. 101 out of 1000 born do not reach their 5th birthday.² Nearly 40% of them do not complete even the first month of life, simply because their medical and nutritional needs are neglected. The common killers of these children are diseases which can be easily prevented like pneumonia, diarrhea, measles, malaria, typhoid etc. Malnutrition accounts for the major underlying cause of death in children.²⁻³

More than 40% of our children (Nearly 8 million) are suffering from undernutrition and anemia.⁴⁻⁵ On the other hand we are increasingly seeing overweight obese children. This is a dangerous situation; these overweight children are as more at risk of developing diseases like diabetes, hypertension and other related disorders.

Lack of safe water, inadequate sanitation shelter and low education, directly effect rights of children. School enrolment ratio is 70% for 5-11 years, only 37% the age of 5 years .The literacy rate of youth is around 58%.Many children are deprived of schooling because they are working as laborers. Many organizations have estimated that there could be anywhere from 8 to 19 million child laborers in the country.⁷ According

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to a survey by the Federal Bureau of Statistics, 40 million children are working as child laborers in the country.⁸⁻⁹ In many cases, the parents of child laborers cannot afford an education for their children or they believe that education does not lead to marketable skills. More than twenty thousand (20,000) children are on the streets of Karachi alone.⁸

Children who are in conflict with law or are in prison, live in miserable conditions. Separate system for juvenile justice is not yet available to our children.⁷

Many other children who deserve serious attention include physically, emotionally & sexually abused children, refugees, kidnapped and the disabled. In Pakistan 15-25% children are sexually abused.¹⁰ No official data exist on various types of Child Abuse but the figures are rising. There has been fourfold increase in the reported cases of maltreatment of Children during the past five years.

Nearly 25000 children were reported to be abused every year ; of these more than 4% were killed after committing heinous crime, unspecific number of cases go unreported, therefore the crime remains hidden.¹⁰ These children are from all socio-economic and cultural strata. Karachi is the second largest city with the highest crime rate against children. Who are the abusers or perpetrators? In 80% of the cases the abuser is someone who is a close acquaintance, someone the child and the family know and trust.¹¹ Almost 50% of children who are abused are also murdered.

The violence against children has increased beyond imagination over the last few years, children are not only subjected to violence but are being used as a tool to perpetrate violence. Lately, there has been a marked rise in suicide bombing, large majority of the bombers are below 18 years of age. Their rights were violated from birth, they have no identity, most are subjected to brutality. We have failed to protect our children, this is a shameful situation for all of us, why have children rights never been implemented? Why we as a nation are unable to keep our promises to

children? Considering the aftermath of violence and lawlessness, can we afford to continue denying the rights of our children?

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