

Rights of the Child

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Daw May May Yi, Leader of the Myanmar Delegation, has just delivered a comprehensive presentation on developments since the submission of the second National Report of Myanmar to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

I shall refrain from repeating most of the points that the Leader of the Delegation has touched upon in her presentation. I should rather like to outline positive factors or positive developments, on the one hand, and challenges, constraints and problems before us and our efforts to overcome them, on the other.

Positive factors/ developments

One positive factor in Myanmar since the submission of the first National Report of Myanmar to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1997 is the promulgation of Rules and Regulations related to the Child Law in December 2001 and the implementation of them.

Another positive factor is the reconvening of the National Convention to draft a new state constitution --- the first step of the 7-step Road Map proclaimed by the Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar on 30 August 2003.

Yet another positive factor is the conclusion of peace agreements between the Government and the 17 armed groups of national races. The Government is currently holding talks with the remaining armed group --- Karen National Union (KNU),

and has reached an understanding with it. This is the first time in the history of modern Myanmar that the Government has reached such peace agreements with the armed groups and that those armed groups have joined hands with the Government in the development of their respective regions.

An additional positive factor is the establishment of the Human Rights Committee in April 2000, which deals with all human rights issues, including the rights of the child. The Committee is chaired by the Minister for Home Affairs and, consists of 20 members. This is an interim step that will lead to the formation, in due course, of a full-fledged national institution on human rights.

Yet another positive factor is the convening of a series of human rights workshops in various parts of the country in cooperation with, and with the assistance of the Australian Government. Three workshops, exclusively devoted to the rights of the child, have also been organized in collaboration with the International Institute for the Rights of the Child (IIDE), the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates (IAYFJM).

As already indicated by the Leader of the Myanmar delegation, one more positive factor is now in place, namely, the establishment of the Committee for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers.

An additional positive factor is the formation of the Myanmar Women Affairs Federation (MWAF) in December 2003. This will further enhance the role of the Myanmar women affairs associations in the protection and promotion of the rights of women and the rights of the child.

A further positive factor is Myanmar's early ratification of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on 21 April 2004. Myanmar is in the forefront of efforts to eradicate smoking and other forms of abuse of tobacco. In recognition of the effective measures taken by the Myanmar Government and

the important role played by the Minister of Health, Dr. Kyaw Myint, the Minister of Health of Myanmar has been awarded "World No Tobacco Day Award 2004" by the W.H.O. earlier this month.

As noted by the Leader of the Myanmar delegation, Myanmar has also ratified the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol on Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children.

Moreover, Myanmar has also acceded to the 1972 Protocol, amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961.

Yet another positive factor is our ongoing cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations. Mr. Razali Ismail, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has visited Myanmar twelve times to date. Professor Sergio Paulo Pinheiro, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, has visited Myanmar six times.

In addition, the Myanmar authorities have also allowed the ILO to maintain its presence in Myanmar, and the ILO Liaison Officer in Yangon is functioning fully in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour.

I have highlighted only some of the positive factors that have taken place during the period under report. Detailed information about these positive developments has been provided in the report itself.

Constraining factors/ constraints

Mr. Chairman,

We are aware of the seriousness and importance of the problems and issues relating to the rights of the child.

One of the specific characteristics of Myanmar is that Myanmar is a multi-racial society with 135 national races. Another specific characteristic is the problem of insurgencies and that of maintaining of peace and tranquility that had bedeviled the country since its independence in 1948 until recently. It is only after the advent of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) that we have come close to resolving the insurgency problem. We are now enjoying peace and tranquility throughout the country. It must be pointed out that these problems have impeded the economic and social development of the country until recently.

Myanmar is still a least developed country (LDC). Although our annual economic growth rate (GDP) of over 10 percent during our third 5-year plan from 2001-2002 to 2005-2006 is fairly high, we are still lagging behind our neighbouring countries in economic development. Shortage of much-needed foreign currencies and financial resources also constitute a substantial constraining factor. We are developing our country through self-reliance, using our own available resources. However, if international assistance and cooperation be forthcoming, it could be helpful.

Although globalization can cut both ways, developing countries are mostly losing out in this process while developed countries are benefiting from it. Effects of globalization on developing countries like Myanmar are also constraining our efforts to ameliorate the economic and social conditions of our people.

Yet another constraint is caused by various forms of sanctions, unfairly imposed on Myanmar by some countries. As a matter of principle, we oppose the use of sanctions, particularly those imposed on developing countries. Sanctions do not serve any useful purpose. In practice, sanctions affect the people at the grassroots and vulnerable groups, including children.

Myanmar is a country in transition from one-party socialist system before 1988 to multi-party democratic system and in transition from socialist economic system to market-oriented open economy. Naturally, we have experienced some difficulties of the transitional period. It takes centuries for the Western democratic countries to reach their present level of democratization. It will take time and a great deal of efforts on our part to reach an advanced stage of democratization and a high level of economic development.

One of our shortcomings lies in our media. The Western media are much more powerful. The fact remains that, owing to their own political motivations, the Western media mostly portray a negative image of Myanmar. We need to do more to overcome this gap in media capabilities.

All these issues are interrelated. Constraints in one sector can slow down progress in another. By the same token, progress in one area can contribute to progress in another. One issue cannot be tackled effectively in isolation from others. They must be tackled in a holistic manner in their interrelationships.

Myanmar's endeavours

Mr. Chairman,

Despite all those constraints, we are making our best efforts to protect and promote the rights of the child as one of our top priorities.

As indicated earlier on, we will continue our cooperation to the extent possible with international organizations, including the Commission on Human Rights and human rights bodies concerned. We keep an open mind, and will take into consideration appropriate comments and sound recommendations by the members of the Committee on the

Rights of the Child (CRC), and will do what we can for the further advancement of the cause of the rights of the child.

Mr. Chairman,

I should like to take this opportunity to inform the Committee that we extend a cordial invitation to the Country Rapporteurs Ms. Yanghee Lee and Ms. Nevena Vuckovic-Sahovic to pay a visit to Myanmar at a mutually convenient date. Seeing is believing. The two Country Rapporteurs should see the situation on the ground and appreciate what we have done for the protection and the promotion of the rights of the child.

I hope that this forthcoming visit to Myanmar will enable them to have a better appreciation and understanding of Myanmar, its people and the effective implementation of the CRC in the country.

Mr. Chairman,

We hope that, under your able guidance, today's session on developments in Myanmar's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be businesslike and fruitful.

We look forward to lively interactions between the members of the Myanmar delegation and the highly respected experts on the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The members of the Myanmar delegation are ready and willing to reply and clarify to any queries by the experts.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.