

Press Release

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UN experts slam India's child rights policies; UP Govt too under fire

India's child rights policies came under sharp attack at a crucial meeting of UN experts on 2-3 June in Geneva. The UN Committee on Rights of Child had met to review the progress made under the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols in India.

While India presented its initial reports under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Bernard Gastaud, Committee Member acting as Country Rapporteur for the report from India urged the delegation from India to change its vocabulary from "will do" to "what you have done."

Speaking from Geneva, VB Ajayan of the India Alliance for Child Rights (IACR), a countrywide alliance working for the realisation of the rights of children, who was present at the meeting as an observer, said, "The Indian delegation could not give satisfactory answers to many questions raised by members of the committee."

During the two-day session, questions were raised on discrimination based on caste, child marriage and violence against children, in particular, sexual abuse of young girls from backward castes. On questions relating to discrimination at various levels, the Government delegation stuck to the rhetoric that the Indian Constitution does not allow any form of discrimination on the basis of caste and religion.

"It is evident from the CRC review process that India has failed to accomplish its constitutional commitments and obligations before various UN body mechanisms on the issue of caste-based discrimination," added Ajayan.

India was represented by a delegation led by Shankar Agarwal, Secretary of the Woman and Child Development Ministry. Representatives from the ministries of woman and child development, labour, health, human resource development and external affairs were also present.

The committee also expressed serious concern over the Badaun gangrape case, said Ajayan. While referring to the UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav's sexist comment to a journalist in the backdrop of the rape and murder of two young girls from backward communities, the committee criticised the administration's insensitivity and sluggish attitude towards such heinous crimes.

Asha Kowtal of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), a part of the alliance, said, "Entrenched discrimination violates Dalits' rights at every stage of their lives beginning from the time they go to school." Referring to increasing crimes against Dalit

women, Kowtal, who also heads the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch said, “Young Dalit girls suffer systematic sexual abuse and the accused get away scott free.”

In his concluding remarks, Gastaud said that there was wide spread discrimination at all levels, lack of accountability, and poor delivery systems.

For more information, write to Ms. Lee Macqueen Coordinator, International Advocacy, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR).

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