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Country: India

Committee: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Agenda: Providing Violence Response and Access to Justice for Children and Youth

INTRODUCTION:

A study on parenting practices and early childhood care led by UNICEF shows that **children are exposed to at least 30 different forms of physical, verbal, and emotional violence and abuse** in households.

A report by child rights NGO CRY discovers that **sexual offense is committed against a child in India every 15 minutes**, and there has been an increase of more than 500% over the past 10 years in crime against minors. These rising cases are a disturbing scenario.

The **conviction rate of these crimes is very low, only close to 3%** of the total number of cases, according to the 2016 NCRB Report. One of the chief causes of the low conviction rate is the **lack of manpower and infrastructure in the criminal justice system**.

Violence towards children can come in multitudinous forms: Physical or mental violence, injury or abuse (including sexual abuse), neglect or negligent treatment, and maltreatment or exploitation. The right to protection from all forms of violence for all girls and boys has been enshrined in international human rights treaties everywhere, including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 19*.

BODY:

Every year, myriads of children interact with justice systems around the world. They could be **victims** of abuse or **witnesses** of violence and crime. They may be **in need of rescue or safety**, or seeking to safeguard their basic rights. But these courts and justice systems often have **prejudice** lingering, commonly towards children from minority groups, or those with financial struggles who cannot afford lawyers and legal fees. Immigrant children, children with disabilities, (etc.) are deprived of their liberty. Neither are these justice systems definitely suited to meet the rights and needs of children. Police, prosecutors, lawyers, and judges - justice professionals - frequently **lack the specific skills required to support child** survivors, witnesses, alleged perpetrators, or victims. Many people are **unaware of the gender-based vulnerabilities** that children confront when interacting with the court system. Even social service providers, who are intended to be the first line of response for children in need, are not always identified or have **insufficient resources to assist children** in seeking protection and justice securely.

Violence against children is pervasive and remains a harsh reality for millions of children in India. **While over half of the world's children have been put through austere violence, 64% of these cases lie in South Asia alone**. All children have the right to be protected from violence, exploitation, and abuse. With India's thick population, unprotected rural areas, and political and religious conflicts and protests, children become an instant target for malicious people. They are forced into labor, used for entertainment, and given inadequate amounts of essential resources like food, water, sleep, shelter, and education. **Orthodox beliefs** about child marriage, girls being good-for-nothing, young boys needing to take care of a whole family as soon as they reach the age of 5, and an endless more, are especially prevalent in India, a country with a rich history but some seriously flawed beliefs. These unintentionally cause extra violence toward innocent children that aren't taught what to do in these situations.

Another perspective to explore:

Violence can result in **physical injury, sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, unplanned pregnancy, and even death**. Scientists and researchers have found notable evidence signifying that violence negatively impacts children's mental and physical health in both the short term and long term. It can **impair and drastically weaken their ability to learn, socialize, communicate, connect, change, and adapt**. It also suggests that toxic stress associated with violence in early childhood can **permanently halt brain development** and damage other parts of the nervous system. Long-term behavioral impacts on children include **aggressive and anti-social behavior, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and criminal behavior**.

Despite these grave physical and mental health consequences, a vast majority of child victims never seek or receive help to recover. What's more, **children who grow up with violence are quite likely to re-enact it on other children when**

they grow into young adults themselves, creating a whole new generation of trauma and victims. The cycle continues, creating a dangerous segment of humans in our species that are willing to harm others.

Access to justice and prevention of violence are two basic rights that shouldn't need to be protected. Nevertheless, we face a situation where we must stand up for the innocent, troubled, and vulnerable youth around us. So, the delegate of India presents solutions at hand, in the making, and for the future:

Current solutions:

- Article 14 of the Indian Constitution provides that, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India". This implies a right in every individual within the territory of India, and duty on the State to ensure that legal protection is accessible to all irrespective of social or economic constraints. To quote Martin Luther King "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". Access to justice is a basic right that guarantees protection of law to all. It is integral to rule of law. No one is above the law, not even the State. Everyone should be able to seek the protection of the laws and legal redress for their grievances. This idea in itself already provides a foundation for more solutions. However, alone, it must be followed to have a true impact.
- UNICEF in India promotes alternatives to detention, such as diversion, as well as restorative justice approaches and alternatives to deprivation of liberty that generally are more conducive to the realization of children's rights. They are also in the interests of public safety and have proven to be more cost-effective. UNICEF also works with professionals to put in place child-sensitive procedures for child victims and witnesses of crime, and professionals are trained accordingly. Such procedures, for example, preclude contact between the child and the alleged perpetrator, allow for the child's full-fledged participation in the process and ensure that he or she is treated with dignity and compassion at all times.

However, these solutions seem to focus on children in cities or developed regions of India. Children in rural areas, from low-income families, in places where courts and justice systems are nearly impossible to reach, and from minority groups have no solution yet. **The delegate of India presents these ideas:**

- Governments should strengthen existing organizations that are trying to solve this issue; provide more resources and training specifically for children to justice systems; normalize imprisonment for acting violently towards children; explore the depths of India to rescue children unable to contact authorities by themselves
- A system we can implement: Each locality's children should be supervised periodically in a safe environment. They should gently and kindly be interrogated about recent events that they've experienced or witnessed. They should feel safe enough to tell the truth if they have experienced violence. Then, in the case that the child is experiencing violence, or has witnessed another child experiencing violence, supervisors can connect them to justice systems.
- Aid children in extreme poverty by providing them with hygiene, clean water & food, safety, education, and clean clothes. Create shelters for children separated from their families and in undeveloped regions. They are at higher risk of violence and should be protected.

CONCLUSION:

Providing justice and protection from violence to the youth is an extremely important action that should never be overlooked. UNICEF's current solutions should be further enhanced and developed to completely protect and save children from exploitation, abuse, and violence. Children themselves aren't educated enough about justice systems and need us to provide them with access to justice.

People should work together and join hands to end this cycle of victims and committers of violence once and for all.