

Text of Speech for Rt. Hon. Prime Minister to address the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of The South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children'

(June 23, 2010)

*Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Government Delegates from the SAARC Countries,
Honourable Members of Constituent Assembly
Chief Secretary, Secretaries of Government of Nepal
Chair of SACG,
Children Representatives,
Representatives from the UN, INGO's, Civil Society and the Media*

I have the great pleasure to be here in this august gathering. First of all, on behalf of the Government of Nepal and myself, I would like to welcome you all to the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children, which was formerly known as South Asia Forum for Ending Violence against Children. Government of Nepal is proud to host this Meeting which will deal with the demanding aspirations of the political decision makers, civil society and children in South Asia to eradicate any form of "Violence against children" in the days to come.

Our communities are entangled in many kinds of violence, which is intolerable to human civilization. Violence against children is the most detrimental and pressing problem that we all are facing in our region. It is the most sensitive issue which must be resolved to safeguard our future. This is why we have all come together today.

Across the region, millions of children are facing abuse, neglect, exploitation and other common forms of violence. These perils transversely cross the social, cultural, religious and ethnic lines. Children in all countries are suffering at their homes, in their schools and communities, in their workplaces or in institutions. Conflict, natural disaster, calamities, climate change and other emergency situations have made their lives more vulnerable. Oftentimes perpetrators of violence are someone known to the children, whom the children trust.

South Asian children also face discrimination and marginalization because of poverty, caste, ethnicity, religious belief or disability which can prevent them from accessing necessary child protection and social welfare services. Children in the region are now up against numerous harmful traditional practices, the most common being early marriage. There are millions of children who are compelled to be involved in the worst forms of labour, drug abuse and commercial sex industry who need our support. In addition, it is vital for us to give attention to children without caregivers, children with HIV/AIDs, children with disabilities, children in trafficking and street children.

Violence against children is even more serious for girl children in the region, where they face gender biases before birth and continues throughout their lives. In Nepal, we have already recognised this as an urgent issue, which is why the Government of Nepal has initiated 2010 as the "Year Against Gender Based Violence". Our goal is to create a Nepal free from gender based violence where women, men, girls and boys can realise their full potential and live a life of dignity. The National Plan of Action on Eliminating Gender Based Violence specifically looks at responding to and preventing gender based violence and will go a long way to ensure the rights of girls and women throughout the country.

At this juncture, I would also like to highlight all of our commitments towards the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. In order to ensure the rights of children for survival,

protection, development and participation, we all are striving hard. Not only this, we are also endeavoring to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We do realize that issues concerning children, including violence and abuse, often transcend our national borders. Therefore, our governments are cooperating on the key issues in the region through SAARC and Global Mechanisms and Directives. The 16th SAARC Summit is a testament to this regional cooperation to create a violence free environment for children in the region. Furthermore, the Summit also emphasizes the commitment shown towards the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia. The SAARC Social Charter, SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, the SAARC Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Children Affected by HIV/AIDS, and the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) are other examples we in this region are agreed to attain. All of these efforts reinforce our commitment to ending violence against children.

Let me also recall to another signpost of our regional cooperation. In 1996, in the SAARC Rawalpindi Resolution on Children in South Asia, SAARC Ministers declared 2001-2010 as the Decade of the Rights of the Child and agreed to eliminate child labour, initiate and strengthen community based social support systems, reduce the Under-5 Child Mortality Rate, lessen the severe and moderate malnutrition and enable all children of primary school age to complete school.

The COLOMBO STATEMENT ON CHILDREN OF SOUTH ASIA in 2009 reiterated a commitment to children's needs and recognized that South Asia continues to face challenges in timely attainment of SDGs and MDGs and the realization of children's rights.

In 2001, based on the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations General Assembly called for a global study on violence against children. A South Asian Regional consultation on "violence against Children" was held in Islamabad in May 2005 and involved governments, ministers, development partners and civil society representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

One of the major outcomes of the Regional Consultation was the formation of the "South Asia Forum for Ending Violence Against Children, a regional mechanism initiated with the vision of ending all forms of violence against all children in South Asia."

However, there is still much progress to be made for children. It is high time for all of us to operationalize our agreements and to materialize our commitments. We all understand the importance of protecting children from violence and today we have an opportunity to capitalize on our time here, and establish a strong regional centre to end violence against children named, "The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children".

I am happy that children representatives from all SAARC countries are also present here with us today. The children's participation has been chosen to represent their countries and has been an inspiration and driving force to our meetings. I urge to our Hon. Ministers and distinguished delegates, who gathered here, to accord top priority to children's voice. Listening to them and considering seriously what they have said can be a hallmark for our new regional centre, and an integral part of our decision-making nationally as well.

In Nepal Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has been created as a nodal ministry to work for the children. Additionally, Central Child Welfare Board has been established to better ensure the

right of the children and work for the protection of the children. The development of over 4,000 child clubs throughout Nepal is an incredible step forward for Child Rights movement and in the realization of child rights throughout the country. Now the Government of Nepal is picking up Child Friendly Local Governance System. We have many non-governmental organizations and their umbrella organization which are dedicated towards the elimination of violence against children. Many other development partners are collaborating towards this effort. But our efforts have been sporadic requiring more concentration, deliberation, attentiveness and integration.

So today I call on the Ministers and government representatives from across the region to seriously consider the proposal and recommendations being put before you. Let us not miss the opportunity to have a serious impact for children. Let's take our commitments to the next level and turn them into valuable actions. We can demonstrate to each other and the world how collaboration and partnership can pave the way to sustainable and long-term solutions for ending violence against children. I see the success of this meeting in attaining these goals.

I thank you all for your attention.