

**South Asia Parliamentarians Platform for Children
2–3 March 2017, Kathmandu**

“Making SDGs work for children in South Asia”

REMARKS

BY

**H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC**

**Honorable Members of Parliaments of South Asia,
Distinguished Delegates,
Regional Director and officials from UNICEF-ROSA and partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to speak at the South Asia Parliamentarians Platform for Children, the very first of its kind, being held in Kathmandu. The presence of the Honourable Parliamentarians at this event is testimony to the importance South Asia attaches to the well-being of our children.

I wish to thank UNICEF ROSA for organizing this event and look forward to continuing our collaboration with UNICEF ROSA in the days ahead.

Hon'ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to refer to the wise words of President Nelson Mandela, who said that *"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."* From the moment they become a human life in their mothers' wombs, till they are old enough to take rational decisions for themselves for their own well-being, it is our responsibility to ensure that their physical needs for adequate food and shelter and their emotional needs for love and care are met. It is also our responsibility to ensure that children live a life free from violence, exploitation and abuse. These are necessary ingredients for their healthy growth to become individuals who reach their full potential and are capable of contributing positively to their society.

Hon'ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globally, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) addressed many issues affecting the lives of children, young people and their families. In the following years since its adoption, tremendous progress was made in reducing child mortality, increasing school enrollment, reducing extreme poverty and more access to safe drinking water and nutritious food. However, this progress was uneven and more importantly, there were thousands of children, who were left out or left behind. With the adoption of the 2015 Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have aspired to change the fate of those left behind. This agenda was crafted with the involvement of a number of stakeholders, who will also have an important role in the implementation of this agenda. Hence, no other global effort till date has exceeded in ambition, commitment and inclusiveness as the SDGs, in working for the betterment of children.

The SDGs add up to three major objectives: to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and sustain both the Earth and our common prosperity. In achieving these objectives, through the SDGs, children must be put at the centre of this agenda. But how do we do that? How do we put children at the forefront of the SDGs? How do we make the SDGs work for children? For various reasons, there are no simple answers to these questions.

First, the SDG agenda is extremely ambitious and transformational with 17 Goals and 169 Targets. As nations struggle to achieve their developmental objectives, there will be competing priorities. This will result in competition for policies, resources and investment.

Second, all Goals and Targets are inter-related and mutually reinforcing. This means that no country can achieve their Goals or reach their Targets by approaching them in isolation. Any effort towards this end must be well-coordinated across various sectors.

Third, it is also a global and universal agenda, applicable to all countries in the world. This requires countries to seek partnerships in order to create opportunities for win – win situations.

Fourth, while pursuing the SDG agenda, there is a need to include all the children of the world, irrespective of nations or borders to ensure that no children are left out or left behind. To ensure this, we will need to reach out to those children who are actually furthest behind – the most vulnerable and marginalized. These are those children who are forgotten and those not

covered by policies, research or data. This will require out-of-the-box solutions to mobilize resources and investment to make policies for the vulnerable that are more viable to implement.

Finally, the SDG agenda emphasizes the means of implementation, follow up and review. If we want children to be at the center of this global agenda, which envisages that all children live up to their full potential in a world free from violence and exploitation, we need an actionable plan to make this vision a reality.

Hon'ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While I applaud the work we have done, it is important to remind ourselves of what still remains to be done. The numbers are clear. According to UNICEF's "The State of the World's Children 2016" Report, unless the world tackles inequality today, by 2030, 167 million children will live in extreme poverty; 60 million children of primary school age will be out of school; and 69 million children under age five will die between 2015–2030. Unfortunately, a large number of these children will happen to be from South Asia.

Hon'ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through its Social Charter, Declarations of the SAARC Summits, Ministerial Statements, Conventions and various related forums, SAARC has continued to give high prominence to its agenda on children. Four SAARC Ministerial Conferences on Children have been held. A SAARC Decade of the Rights of the Child was marked and its implementation was reviewed at the Ministerial level. SAARC has two major Conventions related to children, namely,

Convention on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare. In addition, the SAARC Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children has the mandate to discuss all matters related to children at the technical level. Through our partnership with UNICEF, we have also worked on a number of important areas related to children such as nutrition, sanitation, children affected by HIV & AIDS, and children in disasters.

Similarly, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), an Apex Body of SAARC, has been working for creating partnership and promoting governmental action in South Asia on a number of important and cross-cutting issues such as child marriage, child labour, and trafficking. A High-level Roundtable Meeting on Implementation of the SDGs Related to Ending Violence against Children in South Asia, was held in Colombo in 2016, supported also by UNICEF ROSA. This was a significant step in the right direction, in getting the SDGs to work for the children of South Asia.

Hon'ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my hope that we will all build upon these partnerships which already exist, create partnerships where these are missing, mobilize resources where these are lacking and invest resources for policies already made. If we are to avoid the bleak scenario predicted for the children of the world, we must not be complacent in our efforts to achieve the targets set by the SDGs.

I wish to re-iterate my earlier five points, as we try to move ahead, 1) among competing objectives, we must consciously prioritize policies, resources and

investment for children; 2) We must not approach issues affecting children in isolation and ensure that all efforts are well-coordinated across sectors; 3) We must seek partnerships in order to create opportunities for win – win situations; 4) We must look for out-of-the-box solutions to mobilize resources and investment to make policies targeted at the most vulnerable and marginalized; and, finally, we must have an actionable plan for our vision to ensure that the vision does not remain merely a dream.

Hon’ble Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that the Parliamentarians of South Asia, as key policy makers are placed at the center stage of our efforts to transform the lives of the South Asian children for the better. I cannot, therefore, stress enough the importance of a Platform like this, which gives us all an opportunity to reflect on our experiences, learn from each other, and commit ourselves to do more together. I wish our distinguished Parliamentarians fruitful deliberations during this event and I do hope that the positive outcome of this Platform will be a guiding force for our collective efforts towards making the world a better place for our children.

I thank you.
