

Address by Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS-HRD as Chief Guest in the Global Week Celebrations of the CCF, India on 24-4-2007 in Hyderabad.

National Director, National Coordinator and other distinguished friends...

I am very happy to be a part of this Global Action Week Celebration being celebrated by CCF India as a part of Global chain of celebrations. The theme of the Global Action week, this year is **Education as a Human Right** with an emphasis on Educational for All The theme is of utmost topical importance in the current scenario.

Few global goals have as consistently and as universally been supported as the notion that every child in every corner of the world should have complete exposure to modern education. The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990 set this process in motion by adopting that the goal of Universal Primary Education be achieved by 2000 AD. The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed and extended this commitment. Universal primary education with complete gender equity in primary and secondary education was affirmed again in the same year as Millennium Development Goal.

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As early as 1948, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had envisaged, “ “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of

merit.” India stands committed to this provision. India is also a party to the convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which inter alia recognizes the development of child’s personality, talents and mental and physical ability to their fullest potential. India is a signatory to the UN Contention on the Rights of the Child in the year 1992 which makes it incumbent to protect and monitor the rights and privileges that our children have been guaranteed or enumerated in the convention. The most recent initiative taken by India in this direction is to adopt the National Character for Children in the year 2000.

These Constitutional provisions and international initiatives make it amply clear that we are open to any measures which are designed to increase the well being of our children, who should be the starting point of our commitment to Education for All. We believe that it is only in the liberation of the children, and their freedom through education that the citizens in the country can enjoy real

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democracy. It is only education that can break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. It is only through education that the first step towards equity and bridging of disparities can be taken. It is only through education that possibilities for new opportunities and making choices begin to emerge for all cases of citizens.

In 1993, the Supreme Court of India, in its judgment in the Mohini Jain case, declared that right to education is a fundamental right. Earlier governments had taken shelter under the claim that their obligation to elementary education was restricted only to Article 45 of Directive Principles of State Policy. The 1993 judgment made it clear that right to education as a fundamental right emanates from

the Right to Life in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The debate on the need for a separate provision in the Constitution making right to education a fundamental right started seriously only after this judgment. It was only in 2002 that the 86th Constitutional amendment was brought in to make education a fundamental right and Article 21-A was added to our Constitution: **“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such a way as the State may, by law determine.”** This Constitutional amendment also modified existing Article 45 to “The State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete

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the age of six years.” The contemplated legislative intervention in Art.21-A, when implemented, will bring about a metamorphosis in universalizing education on a mass scale. Serious dialogue is on between the Union and State Governments in regard to this matter. The other significant change was the addition to Article 51A making it the fundamental duty of the parents to provide opportunities to their children or wards to get education till the age of 14. This is supposed to supplement the efforts of the State in extending the mass base of the goals of education:

In 2004, the ‘Manual on Rights – Based Education’ was published by Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok which spells the legal obligations of the governments stemming from the right to education according to the following 4A scheme.

(i) Availability refers to three different kinds of governmental obligation: (a) education as a civil and political right requires governments to permit the establishment of schools respecting freedom of and in education; (b) education as a

social and economic right requires governments to ensure that free and compulsory education is available to all school-age children; and (c) education as

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a cultural right, which requires respect of diversity, expressed in particular through minority and indigenous rights.

(ii) Accessibility means governments must strive for the practical elimination of gender and racial discrimination and ensure the equal enjoyment of all human rights, and must not be satisfied with merely formally prohibiting discrimination. In addition, accessibility relates to the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in different ways; governments are only obliged to provide access to free and compulsory education for all children in the compulsory age range. The right to education should be realized progressively, ensuring all-encompassing, free and compulsory education is available as soon as possible, and facilitating access to post-compulsory education as circumstances permit.

(iii) Acceptability requires minimum guarantees regarding the quality of education, for example in terms of health and safety or professional requirement for teachers, but it is much wider in scope than this. These guarantees have to be set, monitored and enforced by the Government throughout the education system, whether the institutions are public or private. Acceptability has been considerably broadened through the development of international human rights law:

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indigenous and minority rights have prioritized the language of instruction, while the prohibition of corporal punishment has transformed methods of instruction and

school discipline. The emerging perception of children as subjects with the right to education and with rights in education has further extended the boundaries of acceptability to include the contents of educational curricula and textbooks, which are increasingly considered from the perspective of human rights.

(iv) Adaptability requires that schools respond to the needs of each individual child, in keeping with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This reverses the traditional approach in which schools expected the children to adapt to whatever form of education the school provided. As human rights do not exist in isolation, adaptability involves safeguarding all human rights within education as well as enhancing human rights through education. This necessitates cross-sectoral analysis of the impact of education on the whole range of human rights, to monitor, for example, graduate employment by ensuring integrated planning between the relevant sectors.

We have been following these basic ideas over a long period of time. Long before original article 45 was replaced by revised article

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45 in 2002, we could conceptualize and bring into operation a centrally sponsored scheme to boost the universal primary education and to improve the nutritional status of the children of primary classes. I would like to mention details of the scheme which was started pursuant to the F.M's Budget Speech in the Lok Sabha on 15-3-1995. A National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or the Mid day Meal Scheme was launched on 15th August, 1995 to give a boost to universal primary education. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and improve the nutritional status of children in primary classes in

government, local body and government aided schools. From October, 2002, the programme has been extended to children studying in the EGS/AIE centers. The Mid Day Meal Programme through which we have tried to boost the nutritional intake of our poor children and to increase the retention rate in school, is not like any other ordinary Government Scheme. Hailed by the World renowned Economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen “as the biggest pro-poor initiative since the land reforms of Seventies” the Mid Day Meal Scheme in 9.52 lakh schools for 12 crore children is fast firming up complete with a well defined implementation and monitoring process. For us, therefore it is a mission, a matter of faith which we have to fulfill in any case at any cost. With our

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unflinching belief that “feeding children is feeding development” the scheme is sure to enter final phase of qualitative stabilization very soon.

The other main vehicle at present for providing universal education to all children is a comprehensive programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2001-02. This programme has been built upon the experience of several primary education programmes that preceded it including the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP), and Lok Jumbish Project (LJP). It is a partnership programme between the Central and State Governments, which seeks to improve the performance of the school system through a community-owned approach, with specific focus on the provision of quality education. SSA is a time-bound mission, with the objectives of ensuring Universalization of Elementary Education and bridging of gender and social gaps by 2010.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary level(NPEGEL), is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for girls' education in educationally backward blocks by way of girl-child friendly school, and supply of stationery and

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uniforms to under- privileged/disadvantaged girls. Another important component of SSA is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS&AIE), which is specially designed to provide, to children in school-less habitations and out-of-school children, access to elementary education. The scheme supports flexible strategies for out-of-school children through bridge courses, residential camps, drop-in centers, summer camps, and remedial coaching.

Since the introduction of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, State governments have reported a significant decline in the number of children not attending school. When the programme began, the number of out-of-school children in India was estimated to be about 39 million; since then, this figure has fallen steadily, and in November 2005 it was reported to be around 10 million. SSA was launched to ensure that all children between the ages of six and 14 would attend school and receive quality elementary education within a fixed time period. Central outlays for SSA were increased from Rs 1,600 crore in 2001 to R 7,156 crore in 2005-06. A 2 per cent education cess was levied from 2004 to provide additional finances for elementary education and the rate of cess has been increased to 3% during the current year's budge (2007-08).

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One of the basic drawbacks of to-day's schooling is that tens of thousands of school-going children in India are penalized by an educational system that has largely failed to take into account their special learning needs. It is time that we understood the profile of students with learning difficulties. Sustained application of sound scientific knowledge in the classroom can make a difference. Such application can occur only if our schools had more teachers anchored in the knowledge of functions that impact learning. Teachers can then assess their students' strengths and weaknesses in order to modify their instruction, so that all students benefit. Failure in school often portends low self-esteem as adults, and most certainly contributes to poor productivity in professional life. With its escalating needs for growth and development, India cannot afford a future citizenry that hasn't been given the scholastic consideration and opportunities it deserves in childhood. The reluctance of school administrators to train teachers in these areas is puzzling. What is worse is that students' failure permeates into the home. School authorities and teachers are seldom able to reassure distraught parents. Educators and psychologists occasionally offer diagnoses of dyslexia, or other learning disability, but seldom is a learning plan offered to the child or the parent that meets that child's specific requirements. This is because our teachers often do not know how a child learns, and are

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over focused on what a child learns. Given the pressure on children to be all-rounded, it is perhaps a matter of time before most students experience a breakdown in learning. To be successful in school, students need to be good at many things at the same time regardless of their strengths or weaknesses. This leads to frustration, humiliation, and failure among many of them. An undue pressure on the child can adversely affect his capacity to learn, as well as his ability to take pleasure in

academic work. We must not forget that education must and should be joyous, not onerous.

To the children who have gathered here to-day in the rally for the formation of children chain as a token of solidarity for the cause of children's education, I convey my best wishes and blessings with the following inspiring words of the Poet:

“May there always be work for your hands to do:

May your purse always hold a coin or two:

May the sun always shine on your windowpane:

May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain:

May the hand of a friend always be near you:

May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.”

JAI HIND