**[Another Universal Children’s Day](https://nation.com.pk/22-Nov-2020/another-universal-children-s-day" \t "_new)**

Syed Miqdad Mehdi November 22, 2020

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Three decades ago on November 12 1990, Pakistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations adopted this convention on November 20, 1990; the day also known as Universal Children’s Day. But as a state, is the commitment we made thirty years ago result-oriented? The answer is not very definite, as there were many challenges on the way. Some of these challenges were long-standing and a few have emerged consequently. But undoubtedly, there are some achievements with some significant challenges.

For example; the issue of Child Domestic Labor is the biggest issue of child labor, CDL is considered a contemporary form of slavery worldwide and is still a big challenge for legislators; there is a long list of children who lost their lives, faced brutal physical and mental torture, sexual abuse, and cruel behavior. If we see the Tayyaba torture case, the judge and his wife were convicted not for the reason that they hired a child domestic labourer, but for cruelty to children.

The toothless law of 1929 against child marriages is a big issue in all parts of Pakistan except Sindh. The Sindh government enacted a good law, The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 but the surface problem of forced conversions linked to it has yet to be resolved. The Zainab Alert Response and Recovery 2020 was passed with the hope to ensure early response of the state in missing children incidents but unfortunately, the suggested ZARRA agency has not been established, nor the rules notified for the implementation. In many cases including the Kasur and Chunian scandals, the delay in FIRs was one of the reasons for child abuse incidents. The implementation of the Zainab Alert Act can help the state functionaries to respond swiftly in these situations.

The Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 was passed to protect the rights of children in conflict with the law. But its rules are yet to be notified, the low number of probation officers and their capacity issue is a big hindrance to implementing this law properly.

No doubt, the superior courts have shown a commitment towards child rights by establishing child courts all over Pakistan to deal with the matters of children who are victims, witnesses, or accused in criminal matters, but the need of the time is to establish child courts as well as exclusive juvenile courts in every district of Pakistan. The lack of implementation leads to the worst situation, according to Justice Project Pakistan’s report ‘Death Row’s Children’, that at least 6 juvenile offenders amid those 515 individuals have also been unlawfully executed, despite the existence of credible evidence in favor of their juvenility. Recently, Mohammad Iqbal, a juvenile offender put up a 21-year-long legal battle to get his legal right.

Education, the most important fundamental determinant of development, a major component of UNCRC. Despite making significant progress in literacy and education achievement through different schemes, it is still a big challenge. In Punjab, “The Free and Compulsory Education Act.2013” since its enactment, still needs to be notified for implementation and in other provinces, the laws are still not being enforced in letter and spirit to ensure the fundamental right of education as envisaged in Article 25-A of the constitution. Corporal punishment is still a big issue in public and private educational setups.

There is a commitment by the premier to curb hunger and food insecurity but in reality, the fact is that the right to food and health is not positioned in the fundamental rights given by the constitution of Pakistan and hunger is an ignored issue; malnutrition is a chronic, multi-sectoral and complex issue prevailing in Pakistan. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2018, there is no substantial progress in the nutritional status of the population. 40.2 percent of children under five years of age are stunted amongst which 39.4 percent are female and 40.9 percent are male. The percentage of wasted children is 17.7 percent with 17 percent female and 18.4 percent male while 28.9 percent of children are underweight comprising 28.4 percent females and 29.3 percent males.

This year, the establishment of the National Commission on the rights of children, an overarching body under the law is a big step to ensure child rights but the list of challenges is too long seeing 30 years of commitment. As a responsible state, we should not forget at all that the wellbeing of children should always be the priority of a nation.