

# UN declaration on

*The Muslim 1-1-86*

ACCORDING to the Preamble of the UN Declaration on the rights of child 'mankind owes to the child the best it has to give'. Within this broad canvass highlighting the rights of the child the question is: What do we mean by 'mankind'? isn't it an ambiguous opening to such a crucial cause - our children? It therefore, needs an in-depth review and analysis.

The United Nations Declaration adopted unanimously by the UN Assembly shared with its member states a list of children's rights. What would you ask were some of these rights? Lets say that these rights generally included subjects such as health care and medical cover, nutrition, housing, recreation, skills in learning and sharing. Have these rights been given to children? If not then who has the responsibility to see that these rights are indeed im-  
plemented and not violated? Needless to say that the Preamble has not clearly defined as to the agencies/agents whose specific responsibility is for providing these rights to the child? We don't have to search too far for an an-

swer. It is no doubt, the obligation of both the parents and the state to take care of the child and to ensure that it is done so in an environment in which the child would most benefit.

Understandably it can then be said that the moral responsibility for the upbringing of the child as well as of educating him is, in fact, the primary concern of the parents and the community. If we are to assure a successful strategy for child welfare and development it would require a two pronged approach in the actual delivery of civic and social facilities for children's safety and protection.

Without prejudice to the significance of the role of parents there are also certain basic interests and needs of the child which can best be provided by members of the community. However, actions to assuage children's crucial concerns cannot be met by parents alone. In view of this and as well as the importance of the role of other institutions in their commitment to reinforce community-oriented-child-

welfare services warrants genuine support of the political and private leaders in the country. Such a policy framework also requires a recognition of the usefulness of an interrelated network of interests including the dynamic potential of parents and the community in meeting the ever changing challenge of child welfare. It is clear then that the need is to incorporate traditional values and societal structures within the context of the realities of life particularly in underprivileged communities. A case in point is the community in Lyari quarters where even the traffic practices appear to have more concern for speed rather than safety! /

It has always been said that understanding the responsibilities of parenthood is a difficult task. For, it is the community whose children are its future citizens, and its members must therefore have an interest in bringing up its children in the best environment and provide the most effective supportive services particularly in those settlements where the mothers and

the grandmothers are no longer available to guide and protect the child.

I N THE past, children were not really considered as a social force neither were policies for their welfare the prime focus of attention of economists or the planners. Can planners and economists help in reducing the poignancy of parents who find themselves helpless and isolated? The intractable extent of children's concerns have indeed brought to the forefront the role of parents and the community in reaching towards a network of information and services to help the children. It can therefore not be forgotten that from infancy onwards children have certain interests that should and must be met by the parents and the community together although at times in a scenario of poverty and want. Are not children a manifestation of the respect and the love that the mother and father have for one another? Sufficient evidence reveals that a

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family is known to be a happy one which is able to nurture happy children. Love and respect between mother and father is therefore of utmost importance.

It is in the utmost interest of the family and the community that children be brought up in such a manner that will ultimately enable them to adopt to the various methodologies of social change themselves both as beneficiaries whose rights need to be recognised and respected by all concerned in the family and the community and as implementors of the programme. So long as the minimum conditions for the upbringing of children are met and their rights are honoured, the state has every responsibility to mobilize resources of providing a solid base to intimate family relationships at a very personal level.

Policies and plans to help children should not be restricted to poverty stricken areas alone. Another aspect to be given consideration is that child welfare programmes should initially be taken up in communities which

are close to one another and which have easy access to policy planning and implementing agencies themselves and through their child welfare agencies.

It has been observed that lack of adequately trained child welfare workers makes it difficult to launch projects in very poor communities where even the parents appear to be not entirely convinced about organised activities and their own specific role in strengthening the initial ground-laying work at the mohallah level. There is also the fear that if the parents are unable to mobilize resources to undertake any child welfare activity in their own mohallahs outside resources would have to be mustered. And it is then always difficult to guarantee continuation of the child development projects once when outside funds are withdrawn or depleted.

The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development is actively engaged in policy planning and mobilisation of resources—both man and materi-

al. There are today a number of programmes targeted at survival, protection and development of children both at the federal and provincial levels. But their impact requires serious review.

**T**HE National Commission for Child Welfare and Development located in the Social Welfare and Special Education Division which is not only responsible for policy, planning implementation of the convention on the rights of the child but also is monitoring it both at the federal and provincial levels.

While there is no lack of visible goodwill accorded to child welfare programmes in the country the urgent need is to provide systematic and regular flow of useful information to NGOs as well as to parents who are even remotely responding to the needs of their children and reaching out for strategies in realising the goals of the convention as well as meeting the demands of bureaucracy. The NCCWD has opened several unprecedented opportunities of

communication, cooperation and joint programming according to children's needs at the provincial and grassroots level.

The government of Pakistan has also embarked on setting a comprehensive institutional mechanism at the federal level and the provincial level to provide a base to child care programmes. The policy thus formulated is based on issues and concerns and the urgency to fit relevant sectoral inputs in the implementing process. Thus the fact that special emphasis has been given to "systematise" the policy as well as its operations is an indication of the importance being attached to the programme on a professional basis.

In the past there was not much attention given to a systematic review of the impact of existing development policies and services on children. As would be appreciated this is an area where community based-services specifically of benefit to children need to be modified and adapted. Understanding sectoral interrelationships and assessment of development policies in terms of their positive effect on deprived children is the need of the hour.