

## **Editorial**

### **Children: The Least Bothered Segment of Our Population**

Children are almost half of the population of Pakistan. This huge chunk of population was recognized as a distinct segment in 1990 when Pakistan signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, almost two decades after the ratification of the CRC, children in Pakistan continue to face multitude of problems in terms of protection and provision of basic services. Very little to no budgetary allocations have been made since then for the protection, welfare and development of children. The state has otherwise ample resources for non-developmental sectors, but is always excusing from sparing money for programs designed for the protection of children. It is not fortunate for the state that the legislation being made by its own organ is being violated and non-implemented. Such non-implementation often leads to violation of law, resulting in the breakdown of justice administration and disregard to the rule of law. One aspect can be seemed in the absence of separate courts for juveniles. Pakistan has special courts for labors, courts for the family cases, anti-corruption courts, consumer courts and now the military courts but the government did not bother to erect any special court for the juveniles as provided under the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, 2000. This is a glaring violation of JJSO. The idea behind erecting special courts was to deal with the juveniles away from hardened criminals, and provide them an environment which could not have any implications on their personality. On the contrary, we are experiencing that the same courts designed for hardened and adult criminals are being used for the juveniles. Their confidentiality in these courts is at stake and exposed. Absence of juvenile courts is also hindering speedy trial of juveniles. It is also a widely prevalent perception that most of the NGOs also involved in cosmetic work. NGOs in the field of child protection are unable to bridge the gap between needs and services. They have not allocated any fund for establishing juvenile courts. On the contrary, huge sum of money is routinely

spent on holding inconclusive conferences and expensive seminars in five star hotels!

The state, without any further delay, should allocate ample funds for the establishment of exclusive juvenile courts under JJSO and hire separate staff including Judicial Officers who are proficient in juvenile justice for such courts. There is also a dire need of exclusive and well-learned staff for dealing the cases of juveniles. Moreover, we need to have Judicial Officers who are expert in dealing with juvenile cases. Judicial officers in adult courts are mostly concerned with punishment perspective, whereas the juvenile cases need to be treated from the perspective and consideration of rights, reforms and correction. It may be difficult for an ordinary judicial officer who is routinely engaged with cases of hardened criminals to develop such kind of feelings for juveniles. Therefore, the need of exclusive court along with a specialist judge is being felt by all walks of life. It is the era of specialization, coordination, reforms and de-radicalization, so the state has to hire the services of specialists in juvenile justice for the children who are in conflict with law. This would be a positive step towards implementation of JJSO 2000 and our commitment to international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990.

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