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Delegation of Eritrea to the 68th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly
On Agenda item 65 (a, b): Promotion and Protection of the Rights of
Children
At the Third Committee of the Sixth-Eighth Session of the General
Assembly
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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on this agenda item and I also wish to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF and the mandate holders for their introductory remarks on a subject my delegation attaches great importance.

Mr. Chairman,

In line with its firm policy commitment to improve the situation of children, Eritrea has made significant progress in respecting the basic rights and promoting the welfare of the children including, in the justice system, social protection, food security/nutrition, education and health. To accelerate and better coordinate actions in favour of children, the Government has established a national inter-ministerial committee composed of the relevant line ministries. This is supported by a technical body that includes civil society and operates at the national and sub-regional level of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

MDG 4 calls for reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015. Eritrea has been able to reduce the under-five mortality rate by 57.4% between 1990 and 2010. This leaves it to work on the other 10 percent to achieve fully MDG 4, by 2015. According to the Global Countdown report, Eritrea is one of three countries in sub-Saharan Africa that is on track to achieve MDG 4. The same progress is registered with respect to the other two MDGs, 5&6 related to women and HIV/AIDS respectively. This progress has been possible due to a number of steps taken, including instituting the Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses program and the Early Childhood Development Program (ECD).

Controlling diseases that affect children and mothers, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS have also been helpful in the survival and wellbeing of the children. The overall malaria morbidity is reduced by more than 86% and mortality due to malaria by more than 82%, making Eritrea one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to have met the Abuja "Roll Back Malaria" targets. HIV/AIDS prevalence, which was estimated to be 2.4% in 2002, is now down to less than 1% among the general population. Polio, maternal and neonatal tetanus are all eradicated and measles is also put under control. It is important to mention that Eritrea was awarded for high and sustained immunization coverage by the Global Alliance for Vaccine Initiative (GAVI) in 2009 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Mr. Chairman,

Reduction of mortality rate cannot be attributed only to better access to primary health care. Rather, the measures taken to reduce poverty through sustained economic growth and nutritional needs through intensive food security strategy, salt iodization, food fortification and instituting Therapeutic Feeding Centers at hospitals and health centers as well as the social protection scheme have tremendous role in securing the well-being of the most needy and vulnerable members of the society, including the children. Consequently, these steps have also contributed towards reducing the rate of underweight children. The nutritional deficiency is estimated to be between 7% to 11% which is within the WHO’s threshold of 10%. Yet, more work would be needed to address the issue of nutrition for children in the country.
Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea’s principal education objective remains achieving universal elementary education. To meet this objective, free education is provided to all from the primary to higher education. Eritrea, as a multi-ethnic society composed of nine ethnic groups, children are instructed in their mother tongue at the primary level. Special attention is also made to girls, the nomadic communities, disabled children and other needy ones so as secure full access to education. The net enrollment ratio in primary schools which used to be 30% at independence, 1991, it rose to 66.2% in the year 2010/2011.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that protection and prevention measures need to be strengthened against abuse, exploitation and violence. In Eritrea, the Transitional Civil Code, Transitional Penal Code and the Transitional Criminal Procedure Code contain provisions that protect vulnerable children. A plan of action has been put in place to combat the commercial exploitation of children through preventive and rehabilitation approaches. To combat the heinous acts of trafficking in persons generally and children particularly, the Government has embarked on an intensive public awareness campaign at all levels of the communities. Indeed, pursuing and bringing perpetrators of such criminal acts to justice is among the remedial measures of the Government. Street children are assisted and other vulnerable groups such as orphans are also reintegrated with their extended families and in group homes with the view of reducing the number of children cared for in institutions. Female Genital Mutilation is banned and so is corporal punishment.

Since its accession to the ILO Convention on the Minimum Age for Work in 1999, Eritrea has been exerting efforts for the laws to conform to the principles set in the Child Right Convention (CRC). The Eritrean Labor Proclamation No.118/2001 has limited the minimum age for admission to employment at 14 years of age. The Proclamation further underlines that no contract shall be enforceable against a person below the age of 18 years. Likewise, there is an effective legal system that prevents the recruitment of children below the age of 18 years both in the national service and in the Eritrean Defense Forces. With regard to the administration of juvenile justice, the Government has taken modest steps to improve the protection of Children in Conflict with the Law. It has established a probation service to provide them with counselling to help them integrate into the schools and neighbourhoods. Separate chambers where cases of children in conflict with the law are heard in closed sessions and separate from adult offenders are set in the courts. The Government provides facilities to ensure that a child who is detained or imprisoned is separated from adults in their place of detention. The Eritrean laws prohibit the use of torture, inhumane or degrading treatment of punishment against any person, including children under detention.

Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea, as a state party to the two optional protocols of the CRC, in accordance with Article 44 of the CRC provision, has submitted its fourth periodic report early last year and it is awaiting for the UN Secretariat to arrange a date in order to interact with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Finally, my delegation wishes to reassure the Committee that Eritrea remains committed to join hands with the UNICEF and other relevant agencies to promote and protect the rights of children.

Thank you!