

'Is Goa Safe For The Children'- A Critical Consultation

Date: July 28th 2006

Venue: Hotel Fidalgo, Panjim, Goa

Participants: NGOs and GO Representatives

No of Participants: 48

CIF representatives: Naushad Hasan Ansari, Nishit Kumar, Benoy T.D., Chitrakala Acharya and Surabhi Shrivastava

Background:

CHILDLINE India Foundation conducted a study on the issue related to child sexual abuse/paedophilia and sex related tourism. The objective of the study was to study the perception of allied systems about the issue of paedophilia, challenges faced by GOs and NGOs while intervening in the cases of paedophilia and how the issue can be addressed. This study was based on in-depth interviews conducted with representatives from the different allied systems of Goa. During the course of the study 20 stakeholders were interviewed, which included Government and NGOs representatives. It was felt that it was important to disseminate the findings of the study with various stakeholders working in the area of child protection so that collective solutions to the existing challenges could be arrived in consultation with the state administration. The major objective of the consultation was to disseminate the findings of the study, to elicit support from stakeholders at different levels of interventions; to draft recommendation for action; present a strategy paper to Goa State Administration.

Structure of the Workshop

The workshop commenced with the introductory address by Ms Philomena Serrao, Nodal Director, CHILDLINE Goa. She introduced the Chief guest Mr. T.S. Sawant, Director, Women and Child Welfare Govt of Goa and other panel member sitting in the hall.

Mr. Nishit Kumar, Head: Awareness and Advocacy, CHILDLINE India Foundation, introduced the programme and also shared the current scenario of child sexual abuse, issues and challenges. This was followed by a brief sharing of Anchorage case of Mumbai by Ms. Chitrakala Acharya, Head: Services, CHILDLINE India Foundation.

Panellists:

1. Ms. Anita Haladi, Member State Commission for Women and Children
2. Mr. Newman Fernandez, Principal, St. Xavier's College, Mapusa, Goa.
3. Ms. Nishta Desai, Consultant, Child Rights in Goa, Goa.
4. Ms. Shobha Tumaskar, Director of Prosecution, Goa.
5. Ms. Chitrakala Acharya, Head: Services, CIF, Mumbai.

Anchorage Case:

A presentation on the highlights of the Anchorage case was made by Ms Ms. Chitrakala Acharya, which traced the challenges faced by CHILDLINE step by step, with the allied systems and strategies employed to ensure that the case was taken to its logical conclusion, through legal proceedings against the perpetrators and consultative processes with key stakeholders at the local, national and international level. It highlighted the relevance of a single window mechanism like a toll free helpline, 1098 and just a phone call on 1098 6 years ago reporting abuse of children in the Anchorage case, which unearthed the incidence of child sexual abuse in the shelter by run by two ex-British Royal Navy members Duncan Grant and Allen Waters. It took CHILDLINE and its associated partners five years of struggle and on Saturday, 18 March 2006, the court delivered a verdict convicting the two to a sentence of 6 years of rigorous imprisonment for offences related to unnatural sex and abuse of children.

The accused have been fined 20,000 pounds each, of which Rs 5 Lakh will go towards the rehabilitation of the two boys who were residents of Anchorage and whose testimony in court was crucial to the case. The court also held the manager of the Shelter Home guilty for aiding and abetting the crime and assaulting the children. He has been sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment

Presentation on the findings of the In-depth Interviews

The sharing of the Anchorage case of Mumbai was followed by a presentation on the findings of the In-depth Interviews conducted with representatives from the allied systems and other stakeholders. (Copy of the presentation has been attached)

Panel Discussion

The representatives of the NGOs as well as the Government departments and media actively participated in the discussion facilitated by the Panel members mentioned above. The issues concerning children with special focus on Paedophilia and the strategies of addressing the same from different perspective including the roles and responsibilities of the NGOs and the other concerned departments were discussed.

Highlights of the discussion:

- The presentations made evoked mixed responses from the audience.
- There was a general resistance to acknowledge that the incidence of child sexual abuse / paedophilia in Goa.
- Yet another view was that though the incidence of the problem may not seem so grave, we need to acknowledge the existence of the problem and work in a concerted manner towards preventing the rise in the incidence of the problem in future. It is a cause of concern. We need to

know the forms of this problems, how the civil society can proactively act with the government,

- It was also shared that Goa was being projected NGOs and individuals from outside Goa are portraying wrong image of Goa as an unsafe place for children, the issue being made seem to be larger than what it really is.
- It was demanded of the organisers to disclose details of the study, like the source of the findings, details of the respondents However in keeping with the standard practices and norms adhered to in such studies, it was shared that the study only reflects range of perception of allied systems and perceptions may not be grounded, and their recommendations on how the issue could be addressed. It was emphasised that in keeping with the principles of the methodology of the study, this information is strictly confidential and could not be shared

Recommendations

- Need for involvement of young children in understanding the forms of this problems
- Awareness the young people
- All academic institutions should have a Cell, which would work with the students on problems identification, counselling etc.
- Training young people on the issue so that they are prepared as studies show that youth familiar not familiar with sex.
- CIF could play in developing a measurable benchmark towards addressing the issue, as it is a national network being facilitated by CIF, and supported by the Union Government.

The consultation concluded with a vote of thanks by Ms Chitrakala Acharya, wherein it was reiterated that CHILDLINE Goa would continue to work in co-ordination with the local NGOs, networks and Gos towards strengthening the existing child protection mechanisms in the state. CIF also committed to extend the need-based support required towards advocacy initiatives that would be taken up in the state.