

## **Statement by civil society on proposed move to shift Childline to administrative control of MHA**

By All India Working Group on Rights of Children

Date: 15.05.2021

Civil society expresses its reservations to moving Childline to administrative control of MHA fearing reduced use by children of this service and inflicting psychological harm and distress to children.

Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India Ms. Smriti Irani at a Press Briefing on March 15, 2021 stated that there is a plan to move the Childline 1098 services to the administrative control of Ministry of Home Affairs from the current Ministry of Women and Child Development. No details have been spelt out except that move is to “preserve data sensitivity”. On a question by the press whether police personnel will have the requisite skills to deal with children sensitively, the Secretary MWCD is reported as having said, “We will build an ecosystem such that after a complaint is registered the call can be handled by NGOs.” So the current understanding based on this news report is that the calls will be attended to by Police personnel and then, at the discretion of the Police, possibly NGOs will come into the picture for supporting the process.

We, at All India Working Group for Rights of Children (AIWGRC) and those signing this would like to express our reservations to this proposal to move Childline to administrative control of MHA and request the government to reconsider and reverse this move on the following grounds:

1. The most basic concern is how it is likely to ‘serve children who are its primary users’. Is this move likely to benefit its core constituency, the children, or prove counterproductive? Our considered opinion is that it will defeat its core purpose.
2. The statement mentions a provision to register a complaint first by police and then possibly handing it over to NGOs. However, the nature of calls received by Childline is not at all restricted to complaints that require police intervention and recording. Many calls are from children who are in mental distress and require immediate as well as long term counseling and support. Also a significant number of calls include requests for support for food, books, shelter, scholarships to name a few. These calls are not merely about information collection and recording, but require experts who understand children and their psychology and are trained with appropriate skills, attitudes and knowledge to protect and guide the children from that moment onwards. The police are therefore not at all an appropriate point of first contact for receiving these calls. Their primary roles and their training are not conducive or appropriate for this purpose.
3. Children themselves report that when they are deeply distressed, they make silent calls and Childline personnel patiently wait on the line until the child opens up. Children ask, “Will Police be ready to do it?” In addition, they recount that when they have complained to the police about drug peddlers or sexual abusers, the police have exhibited bias and discriminated in favour of the abuser or even taken bribes. In fact, the presence of police at the scene of the abuse or at their homes increases the social pressure and ostracism against them. This is in direct contrast to the more supportive role of Childline personnel that they have experienced (please see Annexure).
4. Equally important is to recognise that various studies from around the country make it clear that children fear the police system. It is most unlikely that they may call a number handled by the Police when they are in a situation of crisis or difficulty. Thus, we are worried that the children will stop making calls for support to this number and place themselves in great danger or be deprived of the services they require. While being part of the police system

may bring in some logistical advantages to the network, the disadvantages mentioned above far outweigh those.

5. It is critical to note that at the moment the present ecosystem within the police force is of law and order and this most often leads to criminalisation of children, even those who are in need of care or protection. We fear that by the time an appropriate child-friendly ecosystem for the purpose is created, innumerable children would have suffered irreparable harm during that span of time. This is unjust and unfair to our children.
6. We completely support preserving data sensitivity, but if we look at the various ministries of the government, they all keep a range of data and the biggest example being Ministry of Finance. We are sure that MWCD also follows similar protocols for preserving the data sensitivity as the rest of the Departments of Government of India and hence instead of shifting this work to MHA, the required measures for strengthening should be done while retaining it within MWCD itself.
7. The objective of Ministry of Home Affairs is very different and its primary focus is not of dealing with children's issues. Hence, we do not consider organisational expertise of MHA in dealing with and managing systems and structures meant for children as compared to MWCD is appropriate.
8. We are sure the government will agree that different departments are run by people with sector specific expertise which enables them to advise the government with the required expertise as well sensitivity. Since MHA's area of expertise is very different, we feel MWCD as the department with the required expertise should continue being the administrative controller of Childline. This is especially because Childline is not just a complaint registering number like 100 but an emergency response mechanism for children and administrators not having the exposure, expertise or sensitivity will not be able to do justice to the requirements of Childline in the short to medium term at least.
9. There has been an experience in Bangalore where Childline has run from within the police department (MakkalaSahayavani). While there were some advantages in this setting wherein Childline was able to access all emergency contacts with ease; this has seen a lot of criticism because of the pressure from Police on which cases could be pursued and how they may be resolved. The police association was partly advantageous, but the interference and control were often not in the best interest of the children.
10. The infrastructure, the mandate and the ability to access support from other child related departments for collaborative response (which the police department may be able to provide) have to be integrated into the present Childline system to strengthen its base and effectiveness. So we would be happy to bring in the advantage of infrastructure into the existing system, where police can and should be invoked where required. But the premise that they should be the core agency looking after children is a position we disagree on.

We urge the government to take a decision where the children and their best interest are at the centre. The current proposal will do more harm to children who have been benefiting from Childline. We urge the government to retain Childline within the administrative control of MWCD and undertake any strengthening measures of Childline while retaining it there.

**Signatories:**

Collectives and Networks (C): 3, Organisations (O): 82, Individuals (I): 24

1. A. Joseph Raj, Secretary, MESSO India, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu (O)
2. A. Devaneyan, State Convenor, Shout for freedom, Tamil Nadu (O)

3. Aarti Gor, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
4. Amita Pitre, Gender and Public Health Professional, Mumbai (I)
5. Anand Lakhan, Nav Nirman Manch- Deen Bandhu Samaj Sahyog– Indore (O)
6. Anita Sinha (Individual), Ranchi, Jharkhand (I)
7. Anushree Jairath, Feminist Researcher, New Delhi (I)
8. Arjun Malge, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
9. Asha Mishra, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (O)
10. Asha Pathak, Bhopal (I)
11. B. Durairaj, Director, Evergreen Trust, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu (O)
12. B.S. Vanarajan, Manitham, Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu (O)
13. Bharti Sharma, AIWG – RC (O)
14. Bipul Thakur, AIWG – RC (O)
15. Brajesh Chaubey (I)
16. Brijesh Arya, Pehchan, Mumbai (O)
17. Bulbul Baksi- Psychotherapist, Secretary Samikshani (O)
18. C. Jeevanandham, Executive Director, NAMCO, Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu (O)
19. Chandana Baksi, Mental Health Consultant (I)
20. D. Athiyaman, Team Facilitator, BEST, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu (O)
21. D. Devanbu, Convenor, Concern for Child Rights Network CCRN, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu (O)
22. D. Selvam, Executive Director, READ, Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu (O)
23. Debasish Rath, Director, Child Line, Puri (O)
24. Deepak Bose, India Alliance for Child Rights, New Delhi (C)
25. Divya Mukand (Individual), New Delhi (I)
26. Dr. Bipasha Roy, Child Rights Activist, Kolkata, West Bengal (I)
27. Dr. Bula Bhadra- Head of the Department, Sociology, Sister Nivedita University (O)
28. Dr. Chandni Basu, Scholar, Sociology of Children and Childhood, Albert Ludwigs University, Freiburg (I)
29. Dr. Debarati Halder, Founder & Honorary Managing Director Centre for Cyber Victim Counseling (O)
30. Dr. Kiran Modi, Udayan Care (O)
31. Dr. Nidhi Gulati, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi (I)
32. Dr. Sohini Chakraborty, Founder, Director of Kolkata Sanved (O)
33. Dr. Anand Jerald, Head of Social Work, PMIST, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. (O)
34. Dr. Casimir Raj. M, Director, Don BOSCO Anbullam, Salem (O)
35. Dr. Jagadeeshwari, Director, SHE, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu (O)
36. Dr. Neelam, State Coordinator, Indo-Global Social Service Society, UP- Gorakhpur (O)
37. Dunu Roy, AIWG – RC (O)
38. Enakshi Ganguly, Co- Founder and Advisor, HAQ Centre for Child Rights, Delhi (O)
39. Fr. George Kollashany, AIWG – RC (O)
40. Gargi Banerjee, AIWG – RC (O)
41. Gourishyam Panda, Advocate, Sonapur, Odisha 767017 (I)
42. J. Mohamed Hussain, Director, INDO Trust, Perambalur, Tamil Nadu(O)
43. J.S. Nirmal Raja, Resource Centre for Participatory Development RCPDS, Madurai, Tamil Nadu (O)
44. Jesu Rahinam, Director, SNEHA, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu (O)
45. Joe Prabu, Coordinator, INM YaR Forum (O)
46. John K. Thirunavukkarasu, Director, ROSE Trust, Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu (O)
47. Joyatri Ray- Director, Equitable Tourism Options (O)
48. K. Murthy, State Convenor, Right to Education Forum [RTE Forum], Tamil Nadu (O)
49. Kavita Ratna, The Concerned for Working Children and AIWG – RC (O)
50. Khushboo Jain, AIWG – RC (O)

51. Lalitha Iyer, Board member Sathi and Founder plus Trust (O)
52. Leena Prasad, Udayan Care (O)
53. M. Krishna Kumar, Secretary, AVVAI, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu (O)
54. Madhu Mehra, Partners for Law in Development, (O)
55. Mallika Mannadir, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
56. Marthanayagam, Executive Director, NEEDS Foundation, Trichy, Tamil Nadu (O)
57. Minal Mahadik, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
58. Mohd. Ikram, Individual (I)
59. Onkar Nath Tiwari (Dr) (Prof), Child Rights and Juvenile Justice Expert (I)
60. P. Pathimaraj, Executive Director, SHEDINDIA, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu (O)
61. Paulami De Sarkar, Programme Manager Child Protection (India) and Regional Safeguarding Focal Point (Asia) India Delegation (O)
62. Poonam Kathuria, Society for Women's Action and Training Initiative - SWATI (O)
63. Priyambada Seal, Individual (I)
64. Priyanka Biswas, Programme Manager- Hummingbird Foundation (O)
65. Priyanka Dherange, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
66. Prof Asha Rane, Founder & Chairperson, Hamara Foundation, Mumbai (O)
67. Prof. Andrew Sesuraj, M, State Convener, Tamil Nadu Child Rights Watch (TNCRW) (O)
68. Prof. Dr. Asha Bajpai, Former Professor of Law and Founding Dean, TISS Visiting Faculty of Law and child rights specialist (O)
69. R. Karuppusamy, State Convenor, Campaign Against Child Labour, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry (O)
70. R.K. Doss, Director, WORD, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu (O)
71. Rajagopal, NEEDS, Virudunagar-Tamil Nadu (O)
72. Rajesh Bhat, Convener, On behalf of Child Rights Collective, Gujarat (C)
73. Rajini Menon, (Individual), New Delhi (I)
74. Rajni Singh Shivakoti, Independent Freelancer, Kolkata, West Bengal (I)
75. Rama Vedula, Individual (I)
76. Ramesh Paliwal, Taabar, Rajasthan (I)
77. Razia Ismail, WeCan Women's Coalition Trust, New Delhi (C)
78. Riddhi Khandar, Prerana, Mumbai (O)
79. Roshni Nugehalli, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), Mumbai (O)
80. S Selvi Nithya, Ph. D Research Scholar, Puducherry (I)
81. S. Karuppasamy, Director, Tamil Nadu Rural Reconstruction Movement, Ramnad, Tamil Nadu (O)
82. S.Devaraj, SPEED Trust, Devipattinam, Ramnad, Tamil Nadu (O)
83. Sachin Sachdeva, AIWG – RC (O)
84. Sangeeta Rege, CEHAT (O)
85. Seema Deshmukh, Muskaan, Bhopal (O)
86. Selvam, Director, Peace Foundation, Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu (O)
87. Shantha Sinha, Former Chairperson NCPCR, Government of India (I)
88. Shipra Jha (Individual), New Delhi (I)
89. Shiv Kumar, Coordinator at Kushinagar, Vigyan Foundation (O)
90. Shivani Taneja, Muskaan, Bhopal (O)
91. Shwetank Mishra, AIWG – RC (O)
92. Shyamala, Secretary, TJSB, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu (O)
93. Sima Banerjee- Director, Programme- New Light, Kolkata, West Bengal (O)
94. Sneha Mishra, Aaina, Odisha (O)
95. Srabani Sarkar- Founder, Director of South Kolkata Hamari Muskan (O)
96. Stegna Jency L.T, MUNNANI, Tamil Nadu (O)
97. Sudha Jha, Advocacy Officer – Vihaan Project, SAATHII Kolkata Office (O)
98. Suranya Aiyar, New Delhi (I)

99. Swagata Raha, Legal Researcher, Bangalore (I)
100. Swapan Panda- Gen. Secretary and Director of Kajla Janakalyan Samity (O)
101. T. Koshy, DB Navajeevan, Hyderabad (O)
102. Tarkeshwar Singh, Ex. Member, CWC, Patna and Ex. Member, State Advisory Board, JJ Act, Bihar and Life Member, Bihar State Council for Child Welfare, Raj Bhawan, Patna (O)
103. T. Shanmugam, Director, OSAI, Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu (O)
104. Urmi Basu- Chief Functionary- New Light, Kolkata, West Bengal (O)
105. Urmi Ray - Associate Director- New Light, Kolkata, west Bengal (O)
106. Urmila Pullat, Independent Lawyer and Researcher (Bangalore) (I)
107. Vasugi, Director, SELVA Trust, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu (O)
108. Virgil D Sami, Executive Director, Arunodaya, Chennai (O)
109. Vishwa Vaibhav Sharma, Safe Society, Gorakhpur (O)