

## Annexure

### VOICES OF CHILDREN

#### **On the proposal to move the Childline1098 services to the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs from the Ministry of Women and Child Development.**

#### **Compiled by Forum for Promotion of Child Participation- Tamil Nadu**

Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India, Ms. Smriti Irani stated in a press meet held on 15, March 2021 that there is a plan to move the Childline1098 services to the administrative control of the Ministry of Home affairs from the Ministry of Women and Child development. If this happens, all ChildLine calls will be handled by police personnel.

This raises the basic concern, if this move will benefit the children; whether it is in the best interest of the child. When it comes to practicality, it is doubtful if children or adults will feel comfortable to call the police.

In the above context, All India Working Group for Rights of Children (AIWG-RC) prepared a petition to be submitted to the Ministry. During the discussion it was suggested that the petition to the ministry should be strengthened with the voice of children on this proposed move. The concern and opinion of children who have benefited from Childline, who have used Childline need to be documented and presented to the government.

In Tamil Nadu, Forum for Promotion of Child Participation (FPCP), a network of likeminded organisations, facilitating the formation of children groups or Collectives, took the initiative in documenting the voices of children across Tamil Nadu.

In the short span of time and amidst the difficulties of the pandemic situation, FPCP members were able to discuss with their children groups either online or small group discussion and presented the views and opinion of children on this very important issue.

S.No.	Children organisation	District	No. of children	Facilitating organisation
1	Confederation of Arunodhaya Children Sangam	Chennai and Tiruvallur	35	Arunodhaya
2	Vidiyal child rights movement	Madurai	21	SakthiVidiyal
3	Viduthalai Chid Rights Movement	Sivgangai	15	Manitham
4	Vergal children movement	Pudukottai	3	MACT
5	Children Movement for Climate Justice	Chengleput and Tiruvallur	17	CCRD
6	Children who benefited from Childline services	Coimbatore	12	CSED, Marialalaya
			103	

103 children from 7 districts participated in the discussion.

All of them except one girl opposed the move to shift Childline1098 services to the administrative control of the Ministry of Home affairs from the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

The one girl, who said yes to the move, pointed out that she believed that police can find solution to all problems, So she welcomes the move to shift Childline to MHA.

All the other children who strongly opposed the move gave the reasons from their experiences as individual and as children groups to justify their stand.

- Childline 1098 was designed to enable children themselves to make a call in times of emergency or need. But if the call is taken by police, children will be scared to make the call. Children are afraid to speak openly to the police for reasons such as fear and embarrassment. Children said that they will openly share problems with Childline personnel but are afraid to tell the police and will not say exactly what they came to say out of fear and harm.
- Childline personnel are trained. They listen with patience and provide the needed support. Childline 1098 call will also be related to support for shelter, food, education etc. Childline personnel attend to these needs also. We are not confident if police will have the time to patiently listen to these calls and take action. Many calls will need immediate counselling which is at present provided by Childline personnel. Police are not trained in counselling. They will not be able to provide counselling. Childline considers all calls as important and unique and will address it. But police will not have the time. Sometimes there are silent calls made by distressed children. Childline personnel will wait on the line for the child to open up. Will police be ready to do it?
- When complaint is made on child labour, Childline will take immediate action. But police will try to justify it.
- Children shared experience where they made complaint to Childline on excess fee collection by schools. Immediately Childline visited the school and initiated action. If the complaint goes to the police they will support the school. Besides, when Childline personnel visited our school, our teachers got angry with us for calling Childline. In case police visits the school on our complaint, teachers will be very angry with us.
- Children recalled incidents where police have sexually abused children, so they do not feel confident of calling police in times of emergency. Especially the girl children said that they will not call Childline if it is attended by police.
- Children said that police are biased and discriminatory. If children like them make a call, they will have prenotions about the children based on their location, appearance and family background and may not respond to the call.
- When we think of police we are only reminded of violence. So we are afraid that they may take violent action against us. When Childline personnel visit a place for rescue of children, children get scared; if police goes for rescue, they will be all the more scared.
- We are afraid that the police may use our complaint to blackmail us.
- When trafficked children are rescued, Childline will give importance to the rehabilitation of the children. Police will only look at the legal aspect.
- Privacy will not be maintained. They gave an instance, where when children informed police about drug pedlars, police shared the names of the children with the drug pedlar which affected the children.
- If the police come home on receiving the call, neighbours will get suspicious about the character of the child. If Childline personnel come, it will not be seen.
- Police are burdened with lot of work. Child welfare police officers are supposed to function in all police stations. But in practice we do not find them. When this is the situation, how will they be able to attend 1098 calls?

- Childline personnel are available for 24 hours dedicated to the service, whether police personnel will be available is a question. Children issues will not be their priority.
- Police are trained in law and order. Their attitude and disposition will not be in the interest of the children.
- We do not believe in the police force in dealing with children. They never deal the case with truth and evidences. If the complaint is against a person in power or authority or is in contact with police, they will not entertain the complaint. We have a fear that they will treat us like an accused person. We will never get justice since they are more political and caste based. Children also shared a fear that police may further abuse the children by getting bribe from the accused. This leads to poor interrogation on children's cases.
- Parents can come and approach Childline easily for further follow-up support. Police is already overloaded with cases and may not be able to follow up and work on rehabilitation.
- MHA has no expertise on handling children, understanding child rights, so we cannot expect child friendly approach and justice for children. They will give least priority for children's issues. If children place a complaint, police will not approach it in the perspective of the children. They will look at it on the aspect of morality, family situation etc. and will try to pacify the children. We have seen this many times in case of reporting on sexual abuse. Police will tell the parent not to file FIR since it will affect the future of the child and let the abuser go scot free. Similarly if children record complaint against abusive situation in school, family or neighbourhood, they will first advise the children to be good. This is more so in the case of complaints made by girl children.
- Police gives update to the media regularly. If the calls go to police, they may divulge the information to the media. Now itself we have seen police giving out the identity of the children to the media. So, we are afraid that our issues may be made public. We do not trust the police
- We have seen instances where police have kept children at the station late night which is illegal. If the calls are attended by police, we are afraid that they may call us to the police station for enquiry. At present police stations are not child friendly.
- Children shared positive experience with Childline 1098 where they had complained about child abuse and immediate action was taken. The identity of the children was kept secret. Childline professional appreciated the children for their action. Will this happen with the police?
- If we share about any abusive incident with our parents, they will feel comfortable to make the complaint with Childline, but they will never come forward to place the complaint with the police.
- When children are referred to Childline for infatuation or drug use, Childline will counsel and help the child to come out of it. But police will look at them only as accused.
- At present there is provision for Childline to work along with Police. But if Childline is going to police, it is not good for the children.
- 12 children who were rescued by Childline and rehabilitated shared that now they have a shelter, they are able to continue their education, rescued from sexually abusive situation and rescued from begging. Children said all these happened because of Childline. They very much doubted if this can happen if police are to handle Childline.

**Childline MHA Petition: Responses by children of Namma Bhoomi, Kundapur taluk, Udupi district, Karnataka**

- The Child line number 1098 exists for children to use it during emergency. Children can contact this number if they are facing issue and to seek support
- If the Child line number 1098 is transferred under the jurisdiction of the police, there is a possibility of the police personnel ignoring the calls made by children during crisis situations to seek support. The primary concern of the police is to discharge their duty to maintain law and order. In such situations, they may not prioritize the issues raised by children who contact Child line for emergency purposes for help and support.
- It is better that the Child line 1098 service is handed over to NGO's who are trained in the field of children rights, have experience working with children and are able to understand children well. If such trained people receive calls by children who either share their concern or seek support to address their issues, then they are able to immediately respond to such requests.