

## **MOCK Universal Periodic Review (UPR) with Children Arranged to Ensure Children's Voices in the UPR Process**

The MOCK UPR with children was a simulated review based on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process conducted by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. In this MOCK UPR, approximately 26 children played the roles of UN member states, representatives of state delegations and a representative of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), the Secretariat of Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh (CRAC, B), organized this MOCK UPR with Children on 28 February 2024 at CIRDAP International Conference Centre in Dhaka, with the support of the European Union, Plan International Bangladesh, and Educo Bangladesh. This initiative aimed to provide children with a platform to voice their opinions and concerns on various issues concerning their rights.

On 13 November 2023, the UNHRC reviewed Bangladesh's human rights situation during the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Out of the 301 suggestions the UN member states provided to Bangladesh as part of the review, about 90 were directly or indirectly related to children's rights. Among these, 20 recommendations about critical issues such as child abuse, child marriage, quality education, child labour and guaranteeing healthcare accessibility were prioritized by the children to be raised during the MOCK UPR.

Faruq Faisal, the Executive Director of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), inaugurated the session. Representatives from Ministries, development partners and embassies in Dhaka, coalition members, various national and international organizations advocating for children's rights, and journalists from print and electronic media attended the session as observers. In his welcome speech, Faruq Faisal emphasized that as today's children will become tomorrow's responsible citizens of the country and hold prominent positions, we must educate them about their rights as children. Likewise, we must pay attention to their concerns and respect their opinions. Tamanna Hoq Riti, Project Coordinator, ASK, gave a brief presentation highlighting the UPR mechanism, the coalition's engagement with the mechanism and the process of arranging this MOCK UPR. She mentioned that the coalition arranged two sessions with children on 18 February and 19 February 2024 as preparations for the MOCK UPR.

In the preparatory sessions, the roles and responsibilities were assigned among children through lottery. The selected recommendations were also distributed similarly. The children rephrased their recommendations according to their own understanding and prepared a statement based on that. During the MOCK session, each child representing UN member states delivered a statement on behalf of their states, which included the existing challenges and recommendations to mitigate those challenges, in front of the delegation of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). In response to their statements, children, playing the role of the state delegation, responded and shared their position on the issues raised. The representative of the UN moderated the session.

The process provided them a platform to present their views to different stakeholders, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) representative. The event also enhanced their understanding and built their capacity to participate in such a technical process. The MOCK UPR

session allowed the participants to experience the complexities and dynamics of the UPR process in a small range.

After the MOCK UPR session, the floor was open for the observers to share their thoughts. Md. Arifur Rahman, Director (Human Rights), MoFA, shared that he was amazed to see the active participation of the children in the session. He said that it felt like he was actually in the UN session. Further, he added that the government is doing as much as possible for the betterment of the children, and the initiatives will continue to work to build a safer society for children while keeping account of the limitations. Shabnaaz Zahereen from Unicef Bangladesh was also impressed by the children's participation. She proposed that this kind of MOCK UPR initiative should be taken nationwide to create more opportunities for children. Ms. Shabnaaz was also delighted that the children could prioritize their problems. Paola Castro Neiderstam (Second Secretary, Program Specialist – Human Rights, Democracy and Gender Equality) of the Embassy of Sweden expressed that it has been her privilege to see the children's engagement and mentioned the collective responsibility of the CSOs and Government to establish child rights. She said we all have a role in ending violence against children and wished to keep up the excellent work.

Later, the children had the opportunity to share their experiences. Anika, one of the participants, expressed her gratitude for participating in the MOCK UPR and for the chance to discuss their rights. She also suggested that more children could benefit from similar activities at the district level. Another participant, Laboni, said she is encouraged to participate in more opportunities like this in the future.

Among the observers, Rasheda Akter, Child Protection and Gender Justice Adviser, Plan International Bangladesh, emphasized the need for greater government attention to pressing child rights issues. She further highlighted the importance of a collective approach and requested that the government establish a solid inter-ministerial base. Halima Akter, Manager, Policy & Advocacy, Educo Bangladesh, focused on mitigating the gaps of the last cycles of UPR by creating an environment for cooperation among NGOs, INGOs, and the government on child rights issues. Nusrat Jahan, Assistant Director of Advocacy & Communication from SOS Children Bangladesh, expressed that she is impressed by the proactive role played by children in the event and applauded the positive changes that have happened in the past years in realizing children's rights. She urged the government to draft the pending rules for the Children Act 2013, emphasizing the importance of enforcing laws protecting children's rights in Bangladesh.

In concluding remarks, Mr. Faruq Faisal thanked all attendees for facilitating its success. He also pleaded with the government to take further measures to enhance the quality of life for children in society. He commended the idea of holding similar activities on a district level.

This event was designed to encourage meaningful engagement with children and promote their active participation in shaping policies that affect them. The collaborative efforts of the organizers and the participants were instrumental in making the event a success, and it is expected to have a positive impact on the advocacy and promotion of child rights in Bangladesh.

# Photo Gallery: MOCK UPR Session



## Photo Gallery: Preparatory Sessions



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