



Sri Lanka's education policy strengthens understanding between different ethnic groups.

Sri Lanka has highlighted the importance of education as an essential tool in combating racism and racial discrimination. Intervening during an Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the on-going 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council, Assistant Director/Foreign Affairs Mr. Madhuka Wickramarachchi, observed that Sri Lanka's education system which is founded on the principles of non-discrimination and equal rights for education have contributed positively in strengthening the understanding between different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

While noting that Sri Lanka introduced free education for all children from primary to university (tertiary) education in 1945, he underlined that it is compulsory by law for a child to get a school education in Sri Lanka and a duty is cast on all parents of a child of not less than five years and not more than 14 years, to enable such child to receive an education. Furthermore, in terms of Article 27 (2) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the state is pledged to the complete eradication of illiteracy and assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels.

Sri Lanka has also put measures in place for the realization of the right to education for all taking into account the dimensions of non-discrimination, and physical and economic accessibility referred to by the Special Rapporteur in his report. The rights of minorities are ensured without discrimination, not only by affording all children the opportunity to pursue their education in their mother tongue, be it Sinhala or Tamil, but also by affording all children the opportunity to study the religion of their choice in the mother tongue. The National Trilingual Policy (2012 – 2020) is being implemented by the Government. The Government is also in the process of formulating policy to encourage ethnically mixed schools.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka has also initiated special educational programmes targeting children with disabilities. Special education programmes had been introduced to 950 schools in Sri Lanka and there are 25 specialized schools for the children with disabilities. Over 50,000 children with special educational needs receive education under these programmes.

Mr. Wickramarachchi while referring to the obligations of the states under the Durban Programme of Action of 2001, added that Sri Lanka has also not ignored economically disadvantaged groups in the education process. Besides provision of free meals to primary students, free text books from the primary up to secondary education, free school uniforms are also provided among other welfare measures, irrespective of the economic status of the child.

Intervening in the discussion under agenda item 9, Sri Lanka welcomed the Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) (A/HRC/23/19). It was noted that Sri Lanka has identified sports, arts and culture as catalysts in promoting reconciliation and dialogue among communities.

All 47 sports federations under the Department of Sports Development are successfully conducting programmes in the former conflict-affected Northern and Eastern provinces. Action is also underway to integrate youth in the reconciliation process, and Sri Lanka is scheduled to host the World Conference on Youth in 2014.

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Sri Lanka Mission
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