

Nine Is Mine: From Kandhamahal to the United Nations

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A delegation of children from different states of India reached New York on 18th September to interact with governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as with UN agencies to high light the need for listening to the voice of children if we have to make real the dream ``Another World that is Possible``, a world that leaves NO ONE behind. The delegation represents the ``Nine is Mine`` advocacy initiative led by the *Wada Na Todo Abhiyan* seeking to ensure that India keeps her promise of dedicating 6% on Education and 3% on Health for children at least by 2015.

The following is an account shared with BIS by Fr. T. Pallithanam who is accompanying the delegation of children to New York.

Komali Jerubabel aka Raja is at the United Nations as part of the delegation of **Nine Is Mine** campaign. The delegation made up of 11 children and 5 adult guides are at the UN to take part in the deliberations on the Post 2015 Development Agenda of the UN. It has come well prepared to voice the aspirations of children of India having conducted over 27 consultations across India with children and having collected over 1,50,000 responses from children on the My World Survey initiated by the UN as a run up to the conversations around Development Agenda Post 2015.

This is a journey; a journey made possible through Human Rights Education and Human Rights Club. As I key in these lines sitting in the UNICEF conference hall directly opposite the UN headquarters the UN General Assembly is holding a special session on the Development Agenda Beyond the Millennium Development Goals. Raja and the rest of the delegation have travelled from India to ``Amplify the voices of the Children, the Voices of the Excluded`` so that their voices may be heard and responded to by the powers that matter.

Raja`s journey though, started a long time ago. He and his family had to literally flee Kandhamal to escape death and destruction during the Odhisa Anti Christian violence of 2008. The family migrated to Rajamundry in Andhra Pradesh and Raja was enrolled in the Lutheran Aided High School to continue his studies. This school is one of the 210 schools where People`s Action For Rural Awakening has been conducting Human Rights Education Programme. Lutheran school had initiated a human rights club in the school as a follow up of the HRE programme. It is from this platform that the school`s enthusiastic HRC members led by their Head Master Mr.Christopher Raja and HR teacher Mr.Martin Sudhakar have been able to convert HR learning into HR practice. The members had been very active in the Nine Is Mine campaign, through signature campaign, Score Card Generation on Education and Health, Rail Yatra and RTI 4 RTE to demand from the government 6% of the GDP for Education and 3% for Heath. In their own way they have contributed to the success of the Nine Is Mine, National Campaign.

The campaign's efforts have shown results. This is what motivated the leaders of the campaign to shift gears and take it to the door step of the UN, to test the ground internationally and demand that all nations make a similar commitment to the children of the world. The MDG 2 speaks of universal primary education, MDG 3 of eliminating gender discrimination and MDG 4 of reduction of Child Mortality. $MDG2 + MDG3 + MDG4 = 9$, another reason to demand 9% of the GDP for Education and Health.

The children drawn from different parts of India have made impressive presence at every event they attended, often receiving standing ovation for their narratives. One is blind, another deaf and two others seriously physically challenged. Overcoming language, speech, hearing and mobility barriers they have spoken in one language about the need for children to be listened to if the world wants to dream of a more humane, just, equitable and peaceful future, a future in which there will be dignity and development for all.

Led by Br Steve Roche of the Christian Brothers the campaign's presence at the UN is the result of the combined effort of several religious orders - the Presentation and the Loretto Sisters and us, Salesians. As we Salesians celebrate the bi-centenary of the birth of Don Bosco let us take on the challenge of participating actively in the Post 2015 Development Agenda the International Community is putting in place.