

A COORDINATED NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION IN CHILD PROTECTION IN SRI LANKA

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Child abuse is a phenomenon that has prevailed for centuries but has only captured worldwide attention in the past few decades. After many years of denial, Sri Lanka, too, has recognized the existence of many forms of violence and cruelty against children and the long and short-term ill effects of abuse on children. Initial work on the extent of sexual abuse and domestic child labour, the existence of physical abuse and description of the use of child soldiers as a form of child abuse, was recognized.

As concern and care of children has been recognized in the traditions of Sri Lanka, the incidents of child abuse were denied or interpreted otherwise in many instances, until recently, in most part of the history. After a phase of denial, as a result of increased awareness and recognition in the society, the culturally justified abusive actions against children, such as physical abuse, and exploitations such as child labour and child involvement in armed conflicts, are increasingly recognized as forms of abuse.

Although Sri Lanka was a signatory to the CRC in 1991, actual political commitment was recognized only after the appointment of a Presidential Task Force in December 1996. The task force recommended several legal amendments including the establishment of a National Child Protection Authority -NCPA (1998) by a Bill in Parliament. Prof. De Silva was the Chairman of both committees.

One of the most important recommendations of the Presidential Task Force on Child Protection was the establishment of a National Child Protection Authority (NCPA). The NCPA bill was presented in parliament by the Minister of Justice in August 1998, and was passed unanimously in November 1998. (National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Act, 1998). It was gazetted in January 1999; the board was appointed in June 1999. The NCPA has a wide mandate in all aspects of prevention and action as regards child abuse.

The mandate of the NCPA would include a broad range of authority, objectives, and duties. These include: Advising government on National policy and measures regarding, prevention and treatment of child abuse as well as protection of children; creating an awareness of the right of the child to be protected from child abuse; consulting and co-ordinating with relevant ministries, local authorities, public and private sector organizations and recommending measures for prevention of child abuse and protection of victims; recommending legal, administrative and other reforms for the effective implementation of national policy; monitoring implementation of the law, the progress of all investigations and criminal proceedings in cases of child abuse; recommending measures in relation to protection, rehabilitation and reintegration into society of children affected by armed conflict; taking appropriate steps for the safety and protection of children in conflicts with the law ('juvenile offenders'); receiving complaints from the public relating to child abuse; advising and assisting local bodies and NGOO to co-ordinate campaigns against child abuse; coordinating, promoting and conducting research on child abuse; organizing and facilitating, workshops, seminars etc; coordinating and assisting the tourist industry to prevent child abuse; preparing and maintaining a national database on child abuse; monitoring organizations providing care for children; serving as liaison to and exchanging information with foreign governments and international organizations.