

**JOINT STATEMENT OF CHILD RIGHTS ADVOCACY COALITION IN BANGLADESH
AND JOINING FORCES BANGLADESH ON
CHILD RIGHTS SITUATION OF BANGLADESH
UPR Pre-session on Bangladesh, Geneva, 2023**

1. Background of the Coalition

The Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh (CRAC, B)¹ is a national platform of ten national and international organisations and networks, and Joining Forces Bangladesh (JF Bangladesh)² is a global platform consisting of six leading international child rights development organisations. The Coalition submitted child-focused reports in the second and third cycles of the UPR. It monitored progress, produced status reports, including mid-term reports, and engaged in advocacy activities with the Government of Bangladesh and other pertinent stakeholders. For the fourth cycle, the Coalition joined the JF Bangladesh and submitted a stakeholders' report on children's rights after having consultations with relevant stakeholders, including children and youth.

2. Key issues of the report

During the third cycle, Bangladesh supported 40 out of 54 recommendations related to children's rights, and 14 were noted. Among them, CRAC, B and JF Bangladesh assessed 40 recommendations (including noted recommendations) aligned with their strategic priorities. According to their assessment, none of these recommendations were fully implemented; 36 were partially implemented, while four were not implemented.

The statement addresses the following points:

- 1) Child Rights Governance;
- 2) Violence against Children;
- 3) Child Marriage;
- 4) Child Labor;
- 5) Right to Education;
- 6) Child Health;
- 7) Rohingya Children.

3. Statement

3.1. Child Rights Governance

Belarus recommends continuing to implement the national social security strategy, prioritising the situation of women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Status: The government has adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) and the National Action Plan- Phase II (2021-2026). But children's issues are not explicitly addressed in NSSS, NPA (2021-2026), or the Social Safety Net programme. Since 2020, no consultations have been held with children in the budget development process in recent years. Lack of proper implementation of existing laws and policies, synergies among actions, inadequate coordination among relevant authorities, and absence of institutional accountability hamper implementation. There is no progress in establishing a separate directorate or a National Commission for Children's Rights to address existing institutional challenges.

Recommendation:

1. Reintroduce publishing Child Focused Budget (CFB), prepare implementation status reports, and organise pre and post-budget consultations with children from all intersections.
2. Finalise a time-bound action plan to establish a separate department/directorate for children.
3. Establish an independent National Commission for Children's Rights (NCRC).
4. Promptly adopt the Rules of the Children Act 2013, avoiding any further delays.

¹ The Coalition started its journey by realising that joint child rights advocacy can bring more value and influence than individual and isolated initiatives. It now carries out coordinated and concerted advocacy with the Government of Bangladesh and other relevant stakeholders for legislative and policy reforms to promote and protect child rights.

² Joining Forces: Forces is a global alliance of the six largest international NGOs working towards the well-being and protection of rights of vulnerable children and young people under Joining Forces Bangladesh – Child Rights Now Platform since 2018.

5. Take a holistic approach to strengthening alternative childcare settings to ensure the overall development of the children.

3.2 Violence Against Children

Recommendations were made (Namibia, Djibouti, Guyana, Egypt, Haiti, France, Nepal, Uruguay) to take all possible measures to address violence against children.

Status: According to ASK documentation,³ from September 2018 to June 2023, different forms of violence against children are rising. 2590 children were killed, and 3596 were raped. These statistics show a worrying pattern of increasing sexual violence in Bangladesh, especially among girls. There is also an alarming trend of online sexual harassment and exploitation of children which requires immediate action.⁴

Recommendation:

1. Ensure proper implementation and monitoring of the NAP on VAWC 2013–2025 and enforcement of existing laws addressing VAC.
2. Prohibit corporal punishment in every sphere, and take appropriate actions against the perpetrators.
3. Define and include the new forms of cybercrime to combat online sexual abuse and exploitation of children while ensuring children's rights to privacy, information, expression and association.

3.3 Child Marriage

Recommendations (Belgium, Denmark, Viet Nam, Gabon) were made to stop early marriage, dowry and other harmful practices.

Status: The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and UNICEF Bangladesh have jointly launched the NPA 2018–2030 to end child marriage in the country entirely by 2041. However, Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia and is among the ten countries worldwide with the highest levels.⁵ No doubt, the pandemic has intensified the situation.⁶ The Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) Rules were adopted in 2018, but neither the Act nor the rules clarify Section 19 of the Act, which allows child marriage under ‘special circumstances’, creating scope for further misuse of the law. The Child Marriage Prevention Committees (CMPCs) lack adequate resources and monitoring mechanisms to make these committees more effective, functional and accountable.

Recommendation:

1. Amend the CMRA Rules to specify the ‘Special Provision’ and a minimum age below which a court cannot grant marriage permission in any circumstances under Section 19 of the Act.
2. Establish a monitoring mechanism to regularly review the status of child marriage in the country and assess the role of the CMPCs.
3. Ensure an easy and accessible birth registration for children irrespective of their background while maintaining the authenticity of the certificates.

3.4 Child Labour

Chile and Spain recommend solid measures to eradicate child labour and ratify the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139).

Status: Bangladesh ratified the ILO’s Minimum Age Convention (No. 138). The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) updated and gazetted the list of hazardous works.⁷ The National Child Labor Survey 2022 reveals a concerning rise of 4.5 per cent in child labour over the past decade.⁸ However, the number of children in hazardous work declined from 1.28 million in 2013 to 1.06 million in 2022. Socio-economic factors, school drop-out during the pandemic, ambiguities in the definition of a child under the existing laws and policies,⁹ inadequate penalties, lack of proper enforcement of laws, and lengthy legal processes

³ <https://www.askbd.org/ask/category/hr-monitoring/violence-against-children/>

⁴ <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/protecting-children-online-and-the-real-world-2103065>

⁵ <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-has-highest-child-marriage-rates-south-asia-unicef-625854>

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19-unicef#:~:text=%E2%80%9CDespite%20significant%20progress%20in%20recent,difficulties%20facing%20millions%20of%20girls>

⁷ The list included five new sectors: dry fish, street children, informal garment sector, brick production and stone lifting, and waste/ garbage collection.

⁸ Child labourer numbers have been 1.77 million in 2022, up from 1.69 million in 2013.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/child-labour-rises-45pc-decade-3373661>

⁹ <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/justice-practice/news/why-child-labour-still-legal-bangladesh-2139296>

are the significant challenges to eradicating child labour.

Recommendation:

1. Allocate a specific budget provision and adopt a national implementation plan reflecting expert opinion and recommendations from CSOs for eliminating all forms of child labour by 2025.
2. Ratify ILO Convention No. 189 (Convention on Domestic Workers) and enact the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Act.
3. Strengthen monitoring of hazardous work for children as per the list and take a multi-sectoral approach to tackle hazardous child labour by developing a rehabilitation strategy.
4. Amend labour law to include the informal sector to protect 95% of the child labourers engaged in the informal sector.

3.5 Right to Education

Recommendations for ensuring quality education and strengthening the education system are received from several countries during the third cycle (Belarus, Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Poland, Thailand, Singapore, Barbados, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Peru, Slovakia, Djibouti, Afghanistan, Argentina)

Status: The government has targeted a 100% literacy rate and vocational upskilling by 2030. The present budget allocation for education is one of the lowest in the world and far below the recommended minimum of 4-6% of GDP and 20% of the national budget.¹⁰ The current education system is multidisciplinary, contributing to increasing discrimination among children from different intersections. The socially excluded and marginalised communities (i.e., ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, intersex children, Dalits, and street children) do not enjoy equal and non-biased access to education.

Recommendation:

1. Allocate a sufficient budget to ensure disability-inclusive infrastructures and enhance the capacity of teachers and management committees.
2. Increase investment in ICT education, focusing on children from remote areas and marginalised groups, i.e., ethnic minorities, Dalits, street children, and children with disabilities.
3. Strengthen SRHR and well-being education comprehensively, enabling teachers to provide SRHR education inclusively and effectively.
4. Enact the Education Act immediately with a robust reflection of the National Education Policy 2010.

3.6 Child Health

Recommendations were made by several countries ((Holy See and Plurinational State of Bolivia) to take all possible measures to increase access to primary health care, particularly in rural areas, to reduce and prevent maternal, fetal and infant mortality.

Status: The National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017–2030 has been developed using a participatory process, with active participation and contributions from the key stakeholder groups. However, there is a lack of effective monitoring at community-level health service centres, especially in remote areas. Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) is being implemented nationwide through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).¹¹ But there is a lack of awareness regarding AFHS¹² among adolescents and parents; stigma around SRHR services for unmarried adolescents resulted in a significant fraction of adolescents not accessing AFHS.

Recommendation:

- Monitor and effectively implement the National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017–2030.
- Raise awareness among community members, including parents, teachers, SMCs, and religious leaders, regarding the importance of SRHR for children and adolescents.
- Appoint an adequate number of psychosocial counsellors at health centres and education institutions.
- Develop a strategic plan for creating playgrounds and swimming pools with appropriate facilities in urban and rural settings to ensure physical and mental growth among children.

3.8 Rohingya Children

¹⁰ [Education in budget 2022-23: Small mercies and dashed hopes | undefined](#)

¹¹ https://adoinfo.dgfp.gov.bd/uploads/policy_guideline/1672578072_Implementation_Research_to_enhance_facility-based_gender-responsive_adolescent-friendly_health_services_in_selected_districts_of_Bangladesh.pdf

¹² https://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bangladesh-AFHC-Report_2017.pdf

Argentina recommends ensuring access to the right to education and guaranteeing the registration of all refugee children born in Bangladesh.

Status: According to UNICEF, by August 2022, more than 130,000 learners were learning per their home country's curriculum.¹³ A study published in 2020 found a lack of funding and resources to provide access to education for Rohingya children in Bangladesh. 75% of babies are born in unsafe and unsanitary bamboo shelters, and almost one-third of children under five have grown stunted by lack of food.¹⁴

Recommendation:

- Strengthening diplomatic ties to secure international funding for Rohingya children's education, health, and essential services, upholding their basic rights.

Members of the CRAC, B and JF Bangladesh

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| 1. Action Aid Bangladesh | 7. Plan International Bangladesh, Save the Children in Bangladesh |
| 2. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) | 8. Save the Children |
| 3. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) | 9. SOS Children's Village International in Bangladesh |
| 4. Child Rights Governance Assembly (CRGA)-Uddipan | 10. Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) |
| 5. Education and Development Foundation- Educo | 11. World Vision Bangladesh. |
| 6. National Girls Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) | |

The statement is endorsed by:

1. Breaking the Silence (BTS)
2. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
3. Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)
4. Good Neighbours
5. Grambangla Unnayan Committee
6. Nagorik Uddyog
7. Sajida Foundation
8. Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF)

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¹³ [Rohingya crisis | UNICEF](#)

¹⁴ [The Rohingya Crisis: Explained | Save the Children](#)