

## GNLU PRESS NOTE No. 16/2018

### Panel Discussion in collaboration with UNICEF: **Migrating from Problems to Solutions: Rights of Migrant Women and Children**

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Gandhinagar, April 06, 2018: A Panel Discussion on “**Migrating from Problems to Solutions: Rights of Migrant Women and Children**” was held at GNLU, today.

This panel discussion was organized **in collaboration with UNICEF** as an inaugural event of the third edition of the **Model United Nations Conference** being held at GNLU from April 06 to 08. The Panellists were:

- Ms Aarti Tikoo Singh, Senior Assistant Editor with the Times of India.
- Mr Sudarshan Ramabadrnan, Deputy Director of India Foundation (A Think Tank)
- Ms Veena Bandyopadhyay, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at **UNICEF**
- Mr Raghav Avasthi, Women’s Rights Activist and a Practising Advocate at the Supreme Court of India
- Ms Niha Masih, Journalist

**Ms Aarti** kick-started the discussion by recounting her personal experience as a migrant who had resided in destitution in squalid camps for over two decades. She outlined the aims of the panel discussion as the need to address continuous problems faced by migrants with a special emphasis on the *most vulnerable sections* of the communities, being the women and children, while questioning the role & responsibility of the State in developing mechanisms to correct.

**Ms Veena’s** response captured the failures of the policy & the hindrances in bringing forth such issues as migrant protection to the fore for public debate due to the lack of data or an established system, an understanding of the distinction between the reasons for voluntary and forced migration and the cycle of vulnerabilities. **Mr Raghav’s** point of argument served as a caution for conferring rights. He highlighted that in the absence of a coherent statutory framework, India’s practices would be inconsistent due to the lack of a requirement to comply with a formal international obligation incorporated into the domestic law.

**Ms Niha** put forth a stance which displayed India’s capability to influence politics in the region, a contention which **Mr Sudarshan** agreed within his statement that in international politics, only interests are permanent while relations are transient. Ms Niha highlighted that India could not be the world’s largest and most celebrated democracy while taking an adverse stance to migrants, one which denies them the right to live with dignity and claim basic inherent rights.

## Conclusion:

In the specific context of women and children, the panel agreed that all security issues should not be lumped together to the extent of denying children their right to survive, and more importantly, thrive, irrespective of the region they came from or the region they were residing in. Further, the discussion highlighted the vacuums within the system, in the form of infrastructure, politicization of issues, scarce resources in their nexus with the local community's needs while exhorting every member of the audience to internalize the principle of non-compromise with health, education and opportunity for children and women.

In this regard, a constructive solution that emerged was the need to train and equip international organizations and actors to aid the children and women in being aware of their rights while creating an environment conducive to their development, in a uniform manner with scope to adapt to the country-specific needs. The Panel put forth the need to holistically strengthen attempts to recognize the rights of the most vulnerable – through policy, society, institutional corrections and a robust feedback mechanism. Further, a solution that emerged during the discussion was that while women and children, whether internally or internationally displaced, should not be discriminated between, in the event of the country's need to prioritize given its resources, basic rights should not be denied to any individual.

The discussion revealed several stereotypes which needed to be overhauled and challenged – pertaining to the treatment of 'migrant' as a dirty word and treating them with hostility while forgetting that they too are human beings who have the right to live with dignity and are often victims of circumstance. The debate also centred around placing accountability on the State, through the development of a formal legal instrument, while also through the recognition of their past practices, tenets of democracy and the Constitution and the morals of humanity. As the voices of the few become the voices of the many, the questions posed to the State seek answers, in the interests of the child and the interests of the women and all those who are in conflict with the law, without fault.

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