

Child Rights In India

Unfinished Agenda

3rd July, 2019
India Habitat Centre

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Advocacy



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

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Representatives of SOS Children's Villages International Office-Asia together with the country representatives of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), at the 19th ACWC Meeting held in Brunei Darussalam in 2019. ACWC is an inter-governmental body comprising twenty representatives of ASEAN Member States for women's rights and children's rights. Reporting to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD), the ACWCs mandates and functions include the development of policies, programmes and innovative strategies to promote and protect the rights of women and children to complement the building of the ASEAN Community.



Children expressing their aspirations about the rights they want to claim, at the Asia Children's Summit 2019, Bangkok. Two children and a young person from Indonesia, Viet Nam and Nepal also attended the event to represent children without parental care.

1

SOS advocacy: Stirring hearts, changing minds

Advocacy is in many ways the face and the voice of SOS Children's Villages as it brings to the world its work and mission. It is also the strategic connector that links SOS Children's Villages with all of its stakeholders, forging partnerships, galvanizing networks, and firmly establishing SOS Children's Villages in the hearts and minds of all in the child rights, child care and child protection community.

For SOS Children's Villages, advocacy is:

Taking action to improve policies and practices that affect the wellbeing of children at risk of losing parental care or who have lost parental care.... Based on our many years' experience working with these children, we influence policymakers, institutions and the society to work for political, social, economic and cultural changes that ensure children can fully enjoy their rights, in a supportive and nurturing environment.

SOS Children's Villages works with many committed stakeholders from across the child rights community to bring attention to the situation of children without parental care. As a child rights practitioner in over 130 countries, SOS Children's Villages supports policy development and implementation to prevent unnecessary family separation, to ensure that comprehensive child care systems are in place with suitable and individually adapted solutions for children placed in alternative care, and to build aftercare mechanisms for youth leaving care.



SOS Children's Villages wants to give orphaned and abandoned children who have been plucked from their families the natural environment that God intended for them. This goal is achieved by the creation of family-based places of education: children's village families

Dr. Hermann Gmeiner

The values that drove Hermann Gmeiner

Our work is premised on the belief that every child has a right to quality care, to a family environment where she/he can grow up with love, safety, and a sense of belonging: the right not to grow up alone. Even though the rights discourse has not gained currency at the time Gmeiner's work on children's villages commenced in the immediate aftermath of World War 2, it is a strong belief in the inherent right of a child to a loving family that drove his vision of SOS Children's Villages.

The post-World War 2 society in Germany and beyond saw an alarming escalation of the number of orphaned and abandoned children, and children and youth living in dismal conditions in either child care institutions or the streets. The inhabitants of SOS Children's Villages at the time therefore included a diverse group of children who were in the most dire circumstances, such as "single and double orphans, refugee children whose parents were dead or missing, neglected children, battered children, children who were mentally ill, children of the occupying forces, and children whose parents, mainly single mothers, lived in squalor." Gmeiner believed wholeheartedly in these children's right to survival and development. He realized that orphaned, abandoned and neglected children are in danger of being lost due to the despair that has taken over them, or may even die. *"Not to be disappointed and not to lose your life is a chance that I want to give you,"* he told them, and SOS Children's Villages was the family educational model he offered them in an attempt to realize their right to another chance at life, to realize their full potential in conditions of security and love.

The rights and needs of children in alternative care, such as a single caregiver to form a lifelong attachment with, the right to grow up in a family environment with siblings, integrated in a community close to cultural

roots, were the very attributes that Gmeiner identified as "the natural environment that God intended for them". These are the attributes reflected in the four original principles that cemented the concept and practice of SOS Children's Villages, and rendered it more effective than the other children's villages of the time – mother, brothers and sisters, the house, and the village.

We strive to promote quality alternative care for children without parental care, including through the family-like care provided through SOS Children's Villages, which serves a particular group of children. Gmeiner believed that this form of care is best suited to those children "who could not find suitable adoptive or foster care parents or who were no longer considered 'suitable for family care'. So the children were mainly those who could only be accommodated in homes." In fact, the concept of SOS Children's Villages was a response to the multiple placements of children across foster families and child care institutions. It is stated that more than two thirds of the children in the children's villages had had a foster family and then been returned to a child care institution, while more than half had had three or more foster families. In other words, SOS Children's Villages was a solution to the problem of social orphans and institutionalization that was offered by Gmeiner.¹

¹ Based on information drawn from Horst Schreiber and Wilfried Vyslozil, *Tracing Our Roots: SOS Children's Villages* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2001).

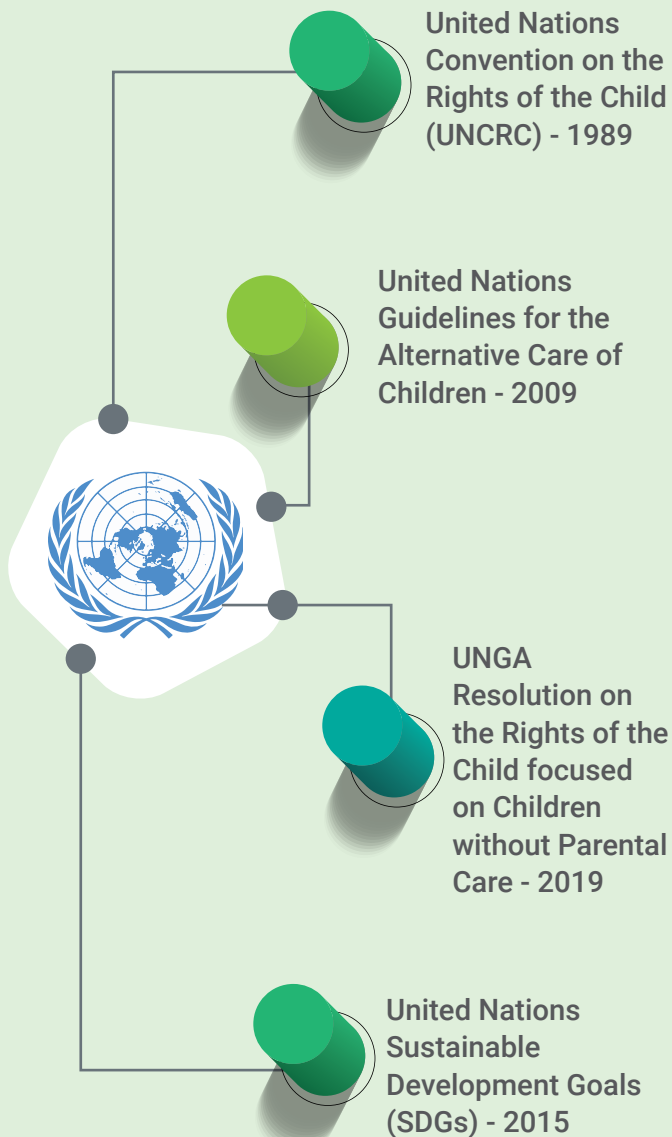
2

Our guiding framework

Our advocacy in Asia is rooted in four United Nations instruments. They provide the bedrock on which we build our advocacy policies, strategies and all interventions. These instruments ensure that we stay grounded in internationally accepted values and practices and share a global ethos, while we also remain culturally sensitive and relevant to an Asian context.



A child from SOS Children's Villages Nepal holding the child and youth friendly version of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, You Have the Right to Care and Protection, developed by SOS Children's Villages International, at a national event organized by SOS Nepal together with Joining Forces partners to celebrate 30 years of the UNCRC and 10 years of the Guidelines, in 2019



United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Adopted in 1989, the UNCRC sets out the rights that children are entitled to in all aspects of their lives. It recognizes that a caring and protective family is central to a child’s development. Nearly every government in the world has signed the convention, and SOS Children’s Villages partners with governments to help them deliver on their obligations under the UNCRC. We base our principles on Article 20 of the UNCRC in particular, which states that *children and young people have the right to special protection and help if they cannot live with their own families*. In many cases, this will involve going into care. Children and young people have the right to go into care, and to have their rights respected even while they are in care.²

United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (“Guidelines”). Welcomed in 2009 by a UN Resolution (A/RES/64/142), the Guidelines provide a framework for ensuring that governments can fulfil children’s right to quality care in families of origin and in alternative care. Their principles state that alternative care must be both necessary and suitable, and it is also highlighted that children need a safe and continuous attachment to a stable caregiver. The Guidelines also emphasize the importance of promoting parental care and preventing family separation. The spirit of the Guidelines is ingrained in our care commitments.³

² To read the UNCRC, visit <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

³ To read the Guidelines, visit <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/673583?ln=en>

2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child focused on Children without Parental Care.

The 2019 UN Resolution on the Rights of the Child is special to SOS Children's Villages and particularly to our work in advocacy because for the first time the Rights of the Child Resolution, which is adopted annually with a focus on different themes or groups of children, focuses on children without parental care. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) sitting on November 12, 2019 adopted this resolution (A/RES/74/133) by consensus. SOS Children's Villages played a pivotal role in suggesting the topic of focus, initiating and driving the conversations with governments at the UN and capital level to adopt this resolution.

It is now possible for us to advocate more powerfully and collaborate with governments so that they put in place quality alternative care systems and invest in the prevention of family separation, as through the resolution all governments have committed to fulfill the rights of children who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care. It also supports the fulfillment of all other rights enshrined in the UNCRC and promotes another key document, the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, as a key reference framework to implement alternative care.

The impact this document has on our work is significant as it scales up our possibilities for

advocacy but also can strongly inform our programmatic direction. The resolution covers topics such as family reunification, gatekeeping, youth in care and preventing unnecessary family separation, all topics core to the work of SOS Children's Villages.⁴

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Adopted in 2015 and valid until 2030, the SDGs, which are accompanied by a pledge to leave no one behind, find great resonance and synergy with our mandate. The SOS Strategy 2030 directly contributes to the SDGs, very specifically to Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16 with a special focus on our target group. These include improving national social protection systems for vulnerable children and youth, fighting inequalities, strengthening youth employability and ending violence against children. All of these goals are included in the Asia regional advocacy priorities of SOS Children's Villages.⁵

Premised on the above international instruments, we have developed two key internal frameworks that guide all our programmes including advocacy, across the federation as well as in Asia.

READ MORE: Refer book 1 of this Information Pack for details on the international and internal policy frameworks that guide our programmes.

⁴ To read the 2019 UN Resolution, visit <https://undocs.org/A/C.3/74/L.21> and visit <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/418236da-103d-40d7-87b2-e8ea3037ca37/2019-UN-Resolution-user-friendly-version.pdf> for the user-friendly version.

⁵ For more information on how we support the SDGs, visit <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/our-work/advocate-for-childrens-rights/sustainable-future>

SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030

Our Strategy 2030 dedicates one of its strategic initiatives to advocating for the rights of children without or at risk of parental care.⁶



⁶ *No Child Should Grow Up Alone: SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2016).

Strategic Initiative 4:

We shall give a voice to our target group and increase our advocacy impact.

Towards this, we will:

- Expand our advocacy work on all levels to ensure that no country leaves children without parental care behind.
- Work with governments and build alliances to improve policies and social protection systems for children and young people without parental care as well as families at risk.
- Advocate for the right of all children to quality care and for the full implementation of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

SOS Care Promise

The SOS Care Promise is our foundational internal framework which lays out the nine commitments we make in what we call our care foundation. The ninth of these care commitments includes and refers to advocacy.



Representatives of SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka and UNICEF Sri Lanka at an advocacy event organized by SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka in 2019

Care Commitment 9

We partner for supporting services and advocate for quality care.

We commit to focus on our care expertise and partner for supporting services such as education, healthcare and economic empowerment. We also engage with governments and other decision makers to promote quality care.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ADVOCACY



Source: *SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children’s Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People*. SOS Children’s Villages International, 2018.

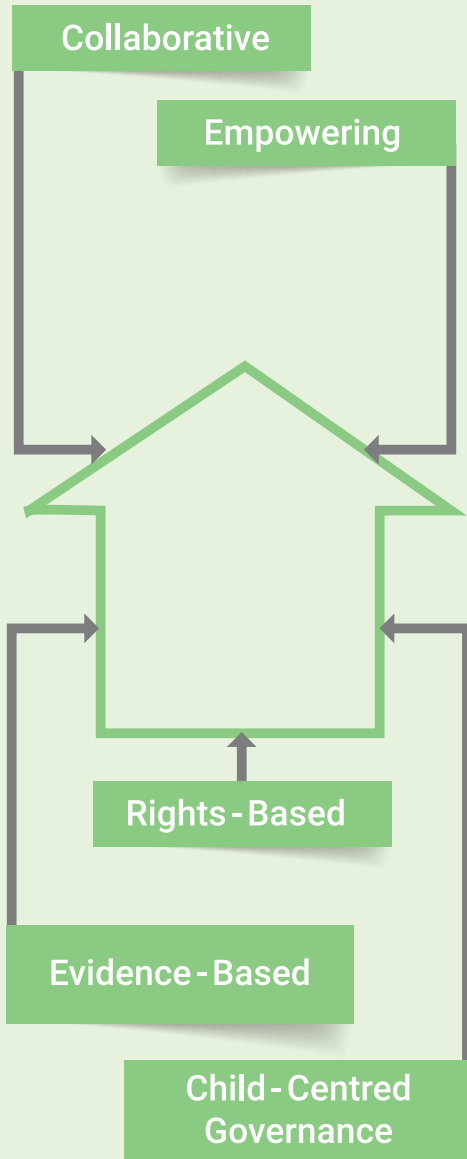
We consider ourselves an integral part of national child welfare systems. We work closely with authorities and other agencies, taking advantage of all available skills and resources to focus on the improvement of the situation of children, especially on ensuring quality across alternative care options and preventing family separation. In addition, we engage and support the efforts of like-minded organizations to advocate for policies and practices which counter the root causes of child vulnerability. We firmly believe that evidence-based and targeted advocacy will, in time, lead to a society which better protects and provides for its children, thus contributing to the realization of our organization’s vision and mission. With every action, we ensure that the voices of children of our target group are heard.⁷

⁷ *SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children’s Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People* (Austria: SOS Children’s Villages International, 2018), p.23.

3 Advocacy strategies in Asia



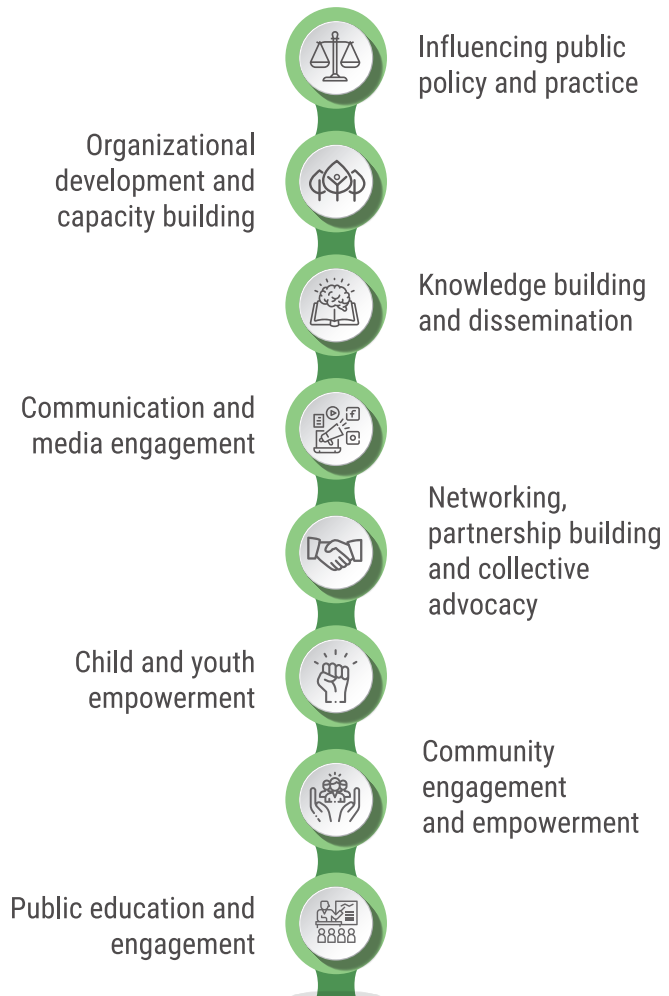
SOS staff committing to their country advocacy priorities and objectives at the regional workshop on the Asia Advocacy Strategy in 2019



Source: *Asia Advocacy Strategy 2018-2020*. SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia, 2018.

Strategic Approach

Our advocacy in Asia is targeted. We have eight specific strategic actions in our regional advocacy strategy, which help us stay goal-oriented and result-focused without losing the cultural and interpersonal sensitivity that our work requires.





Strategic actions

In the following pages, we are proud to share some of the best practice examples from across our member associations in Asia.



Strategic Action 1: Influencing public policy and practice

We strive to maintain a strong agenda both at the Asia regional and national levels to advocate for a range of quality alternative care options that respond to the needs of each individual child. We are guided by the principle of best interest of the child. We firmly believe in the uniqueness of each child and the specificity of her/his situation. Hence, we advocate that each child be provided with a care solution that is best suited to the child's specific needs and circumstances.

Between 2015-2020, our member associations in Asia have supported governments in the formulation of over 30 laws, policies, standards and national action plans related to children.



Shubha Murthi, Deputy COO & International Director-Asia, SOS Children's Villages International, with Madam Nguyen Thi Ha, Deputy Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs in Viet Nam

SOS India, SOS Nepal and SOS Sri Lanka have made very significant contributions to the Juvenile Justice Act 2015, Children's Act 2018 and National Alternative Care Policy 2019 respectively. Today, all three instruments have incorporated provisions related to the quality alternative care for children, in alignment with the UN Guidelines. For us, it is a significant achievement that due to our interventions, the Juvenile Justice Act 2015 of India recognizes family-like care under Group Foster Care, while the National Alternative Care policy 2019 of Sri Lanka recognizes the importance of keeping siblings together and the rights of youth leaving care, aspects of alternative care hitherto overlooked in legal and policy frameworks in the region.



An SOS family in SOS Children's Villages India. SOS Children's Villages is the largest provider of family-like care in the world as well as in Asia.



A foster mother with her child, supported by SOS Children's Villages Indonesia

SOS Children's Villages Indonesia actively contributed to the drafting of the Ministerial Regulation of Social Affairs on Foster Care and is currently contributing to the development of the Implementation Guidelines on the Ministerial Foster Care Regulation.

SOS Children's Villages Philippines conducted a Policy Forum on Alternative Care in November 2019 to lobby for the passage and adoption of the Alternative Child Care Bill in the Philippines (House Bill No. 5581). This event was conducted in collaboration with the House Committee on the Welfare of Children, at the House of Representatives. This forum discussed the need to advocate for the Alternative Child Care Bill, which requires the state to ensure that all children without parental care are given an alternative family. A range of care options are given special mention in the bill including adoption, foster care, kinship care, family-like care and quality residential care.



Hon. Representative Maria Lourdes Acosta Alba, the Vice-Chairwoman of the House Committee on the Welfare of Children, current author of the Alternative Child Care Bill in the Lower House, committed to the passage of the Bill.

SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka held a forum on Strengthening the Employability of Youth Leaving Care in August 2019, together with the Generation Never Give Up (GNG) Network of care leavers in Sri Lanka, to create a dialogue among policymakers, employers, educational institutions and youth about the employability of young people leaving care. In response to the recommendations submitted to the Prime Minister's Office at the event, a letter has been sent to 16 ministries/departments to propose a suitable mechanism to implement the recommendations.



Panel discussion with stakeholders moderated by GNG Network leaders



Strategic Action 2: Strengthening member associations to become powerful advocates for quality care



The advocacy focal points of the SOS member associations in Asia engaged in a stimulating discussion during a regional advocacy training workshop in 2019

In Asia, SOS Children's Villages strives to ensure that all member associations are well-capacitated and have not only the right structure and resources but also the right values and commitment to promote the rights of parentless children and those at risk of losing their families.

- We commit to advocating for a range of creative, personalized and suitable care options for children who are at risk of losing parental care and thereby, closing the door on institutionalization.
- We enable our member associations to form powerful relationships at every strata

of society, starting with their own governments and service providers to communities and families, in the interest of the children and young people in their countries.

- We position ourselves in all our member countries to be able to lead and influence policy and practice on the rights of children and youth in alternative care, and those leaving care.
- We are committed to advocating for the rights and needs of children in care all the way through childhood up to their transition into independent and contributing members of society.

Mentoring for powerful advocacy

Investment in building strong advocacy is a priority for us. Our country teams are provided with training and mentorship, and are invited to a reflective practice in advocacy in order that they may grow into powerful, well informed, skilled advocates of the rights of children needing alternative care and those at risk. We provide constant guidance and motivation for our team to cultivate the attributes of a powerful, passionate and empathetic advocate.



Strategic Action 3: Knowledge building and dissemination

A strong evidence-base for the issues we highlight and the proposed solutions is required in order to influence or convince stakeholders who have the power to address these issues and make a positive change in the lives of our target group. It is also necessary to share and debate on the generated evidence widely in order to build knowledge and create a productive discourse in the field about the alternative care of children, leading towards effective and sustainable solutions.

JOY: A treasure trove of life stories

JOY is an exhilarating initiative, which captures the Journey of Our Youth in the form of two coffee table books. In a powerfully moving and motivating collection of 40 diverse, real life stories, JOY captures the success of care leavers⁹ who have exited the family-like care of SOS Children's Villages in Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, that nurtured every one of them. The JOY process provided these care leavers with a space and opportunity to reflect, process and relate the most profound moments of their lives' journeys, including their struggles and successes in their journey towards independence. Success in the JOY project was measured in terms of reaching full potential and not merely in terms of economics alone. We want the world to see and be inspired by the manner in which our young people have been raised and geared to take the toughest of life's challenges in their stride, and to leave no stone unturned in their quest to lead independent, meaningful and contented lives as contributing members of society.

⁹ A care leaver is an individual who has grown up in alternative care and left care upon reaching the age of majority as per the country's law, which is usually 18 years (although in SOS Children's Villages, the upper age limit depends on the readiness of the young person for leaving care).



SOS Children's Villages Thailand was selected as the representative of family-like care in one of the first comparative alternative care researches conducted in Thailand. Bath University in the UK, in collaboration with the Thammasat University in Thailand, conducted a research titled *Sharing their Narratives: Exploring the lived experiences of children, parents and communities who are at the centre of alternative care provision in Thailand*. The study aims to reflect the voices of children (aged 10-18) that are currently in different alternative care settings – what they think of the care provided, how much they know about their care, and why they are placed there; learn why parents relinquished their children and placed them in alternative care; and learn how communities view alternative care.



A child taking part in the children's consultation conducted for the 'Sharing their Narratives' research



An SOS mother and children in Viet Nam reading the *You Have the Right to Care and Protection*

A child and youth-friendly version of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, *You Have the Right to Care and Protection*, was developed by SOS Children's Villages International on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Guidelines (20th of November 2019).¹⁰ SOS Children's Villages Viet Nam, in a child-focused initiative, translated this booklet into the local language, for children in Viet Nam to learn in an interesting and easy way about children who do not have parents and homes like they do. The booklet informs children and youth about their right to live in a supportive family environment. Using an easy to read language and illustrations, it covers concrete key questions and answers on what has to happen in case a child cannot live with the parents or is at risk of being separated from them. This booklet was first translated and sent to 236 families in 17 SOS Children's Villages and 12 Hermann Gmeiner Schools nationwide. It was also posted on the organization's website and Facebook page, for public education. In an attempt at finding creative ways to educate both children and adults, SOS Viet Nam went on to launch a story-telling contest based on this booklet to make children, young people and caregivers reflect on the booklet's content.

¹⁰ *You Have the Right to Care and Protection: The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in child and youth friendly language* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2019).



Strategic Action 4: Communication and media engagement

The impact of advocacy is reliant on sending the right message to the right target at the right time, for which an effective communication strategy is key. In this, the media is a powerful stakeholder that can be used as a forceful communication tool to influence the government while educating and mobilizing the public to address issues related to alternative care.

Children from SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh have been active participants on mass media, contributing to television talk shows and radio shows, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been raising children's concerns about a variety of issues such as the vulnerability of parentless children, and special concerns related to education during COVID times. A four-episode television show was also produced and telecast, focused on the work of SOS Children's Villages and the need for a national policy on alternative care referring the Children's Law.



A child from SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh appearing on a TV show along with policy makers



Representatives of SOS Children's Villages Laos and the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, at their television Studio

SOS Laos is in partnership with the media channel of Lao People Revolution Youth Union in a very dynamic and proactive collaboration, which also includes the Lao National Television, to promote quality alternative care as well as the work of SOS Children's Villages. Children and youth are also taking part in these media programmes.



**Strategic
Action 5:
Networking,
partnership
building and
collective
advocacy**

A collective voice is always more powerful than a solitary one. Collaboration renders advocacy efforts more fruitful and stimulating as they bring more resources, ideas and people to the table. Collective advocacy builds a community around the issue and provides opportunity for learning, leadership and visibility.

In Asia, SOS Children's Villages through its member associations and International Office Asia, is currently engaged in over 35 networks and 15 partnerships for the purpose of advocating for quality care, child protection and child rights.



In 2019, a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia and South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), a SAARC Apex body which is an inter-governmental body with a vision that all children, throughout South Asia enjoy their right to an environment free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination.



Signing of the MoU between SAIEVAC and SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia



A meeting of the 18+ Alliance members, at SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka

The 18+ Alliance of civil society and corporate partners, the first of its kind in Asia, was formed in 2017 by SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka, with the aim of promoting the rights of care leavers and coordinating support services for these young people. The members comprise non-governmental and voluntary organizations, private sector companies and alternative care providers. This was an outcome of 18+: Building Support Systems for Youth Leaving Care, one of the pioneering advocacy initiatives of SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka that promotes the rights of care leavers together with the care leavers themselves.

SOS Children's Villages Nepal is a co-founder of CNET (Child Care Home Network), the only child rights network in Nepal with a specific focus on the alternative care of children. CNET is a long-standing, reputed network that has been in existence since 2000 and has even been involved in drafting the Constitution of Nepal. It is also involved in the Universal Periodic Reporting (UPR) and UNCRC Optional Protocol reporting.



11th General Assembly of CNET with newly appointed members including child member and SOS representative, 2021

Joining Forces to End Violence against Children



Joining Forces Bangladesh meeting with the Minister of Planning in 2020, to advocate for demonstrated political commitment to realize the rights of children, especially those most left behind

In 2017, SOS Children's Villages joined forces with five of the world's largest child-focused agencies: Child Fund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision International.¹¹ Our singular purpose was to use our collective power to accelerate change to secure children their rights and end violence against them. We have piloted innovative and effective approaches worldwide and we have been driven by the voices and needs of children in doing this. Here are some of the initiatives we took in Asia together with the Joining Forces alliance:

- Seven member associations of SOS Children's Villages in Asia are participating in the Joining

Forces initiatives under the two streams Child Rights Now (CRN) and Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC). These are SOS Bangladesh, SOS Cambodia, SOS India, SOS Indonesia, SOS Nepal, SOS Philippines and SOS Thailand. SOS Nepal led the country team in 2019-2020 while SOS Philippines acted as the co-convenor of their team.

- Five countries in Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Philippines contributed to the global report on the status of child rights, titled *A Second Revolution: Thirty Years of Child Rights, and the Unfinished Agenda*.¹²

¹¹ For further information, visit <https://joining-forces.org/>.

¹² Child Rights Now!, *A Second Revolution: Thirty Years of Child Rights, and the Unfinished Agenda* (UK: Joining Forces, 2019).

- Six of the country teams launched National CRN reports in 2019.
- India launched a social media campaign on Sexual violence against Children in India.
- Indonesia launched a Violence-free School initiative.
- Philippines launched initiatives to combat Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC) and also to combat Physical and Humiliating Punishment (PHP) of children. Philippines also launched a programme

for strengthening the Local Council for the Protection of Children.

- Joining Forces country teams in Asia are actively advocating for the rights of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, SOS Children's Villages in Asia, together with Joining Forces partners sent nearly 15 joint appeals to the governments and regional inter-governmental bodies, highlighting the challenges faced by children including those without parental care because of the pandemic and the redressive actions governments need to take.



In July 2019, **SOS India entered into a formal agreement with UNICEF India**, for a technical partnership on improving alternative care practices in States of Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. It involved handholding of government child care institutions for a period of one year, and the capacity building of various stakeholders and child care functionaries in the two States.

A global first!

International Care Leavers' Convention 2020

Care leavers, or young people who have transitioned from alternative care into independent living, have taken centre stage in our advocacy work and will be a powerful force in advocacy in the future. Care leavers throughout the world mobilized in a powerful first ever International Care Leavers' Convention, held from October-December 2020, as a series of four pre-events and a three-day main event with over 900 participants from 83 countries across six continents. A post-convention policy forum was also held in December to galvanize and take forward the decisions and commitments towards advocating for issues of care leavers worldwide. The three-month Convention brought together a wide array of speakers from all across the globe, including policy makers, researchers, practitioners and care leavers, who shared their insights and valuable suggestions.

What we saw happen at this momentous event:

- Care leavers connected with each other internationally and used the space and tools provided for them to exchange their experiences, knowledge and challenges, enriching each other's learning.
- Care leavers were empowered by engaging with service providers, researchers and policy makers working with and for care leavers.
- Care leavers were enabled to advocate and amplify their voices, and attract the attention of decision makers to act upon their recommendations.



We are not what we went through, we are how we came out of it - as a lioness, through the fire

Ruth Wacua, Kenya Society of Care Leavers (KESCA).

The convention was organized by four organizations, i.e. Kinderperspectief (Netherlands), SOS Children's Villages (International Office Asia), Udayan Care (India) and the University of Hildesheim (Germany), in collaboration with four care leavers' networks, i.e. Care Leavers' Association and Network (CLAN), India, Generation Never Give-up Network (GNGN), Sri Lanka, Latin America Network of Care Leavers and Zimbabwe Care Leavers' Network.



What the care leavers expect from the policy makers and other stakeholders:

1. We need to build an International Care Leavers' Network and work towards the 2nd International Care Leavers' Convention in 2022.
2. We need to spread and advocate for the Declaration by care leavers in times of COVID-19.
3. We should have a seat at the table at national and international forums.
4. We need access to free and quality mental health services after leaving care.
5. We need a proactive rather than reactive approach to mitigate challenges and adjustment difficulties faced by care leavers. Implementation is key.
6. 25 should be the new 18 (soft landing from Planet Youth Care to Planet Earth).
7. We want caregivers who understand, accept and nourish us. We want to be better prepared for leaving care.
8. We want more participatory research on our strengths, resilience and challenges.

Policymakers representing Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Italy, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe as well as the UNCRC Committee welcomed the recommendations, committing to put them into action.

The participating care leavers went back with the commitment to build a global family, and the confidence with which they said loud and clear, "nothing for us without us".

As an immediate outcome of the Convention, a virtual space for care leavers has been created in the form of www.careleaverscommunity.com, which aims to become a global repository of resources on leaving care while providing an interactive space for the care leavers from all across the world.¹³

¹³ Visit <http://www.careleaversconvention.udayancare.in/> for more information and the event report.



Strategic Action 6: Child and youth empowerment

Our commitment is to make our organization one that listens to children and youth, give them the space to speak out, and to become agents of their own rights. As an organization that works directly with children and youth as a service provider, we have an invaluable opportunity to create that space, one which we capitalize on to empower our children and youth to claim their civic rights. We firmly believe that they should be in the driving seat in advocating for their own rights. That is when advocacy becomes most meaningful.



We create the space for children and young people in care to be involved in UN reporting mechanisms, such as the UNCRC reporting and Universal Periodic Reporting (UPR).

Nguyen Mac Phuong Thao, a child from SOS Children's Viet Nam, spoke out at the UNCRC Pre-session in October 2020, highlighting the rights of children in alternative care



Pabitra Lakai-Khadka [second from the right], a child from SOS Children's Villages Nepal was part of the six-member team that developed the Child-led Universal Periodic Reporting (UPR) Cycle III Report in Nepal, in 2020

Visit https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/2ee87f70-bf9f-4c06-ba6f-5d9738d53586/CYPA_toolkit_web_ENGLISH.pdf to read the Toolkit for Children and Young People's Participation in Advocacy developed by SOS Children's Villages International.



The first ever National SOS Children's Forum in Viet Nam was held in August 2019, with the participation of children from 17 SOS Children's Villages, care leavers, mothers, government leaders, and the Goodwill Ambassador of SOS Viet Nam. The forum created the opportunity for children growing up in SOS Children's Villages all over Viet Nam as well as care leavers to raise their voices, and express their points of view and expectations. Leaders of the government and organizations working for children gained an invaluable opportunity to hear directly from children and understand their perspectives related to child care and protection, education, youth employment and child and youth participation in policy formulation.



Children lined up to deliver their messages to the policy makers at the SOS National Children's Forum in Viet Nam

The first ever care leavers' network in Asia

Generation Never Give-up (GNG) Network in Sri Lanka was established in October 2017 following the advocacy initiative of SOS Sri Lanka, called 18+: Building Support Systems for Youth Leaving Care. This was the birth of the first ever care leavers' network in the Asia region! The GNG Network has a vision and mandate to enhance the quality of life of care leavers in their transition years by providing peer support, and by engaging in powerful self-advocacy on behalf of specific issues faced by care leavers which they take up with national authorities.

Birth certificates for children in care as well as care leavers is a sensitive issue. The words and personal data such as parents' marital status on the birth certificate can greatly affect the young person's social status and acceptance in society later in life. After strong and successful lobbying by the GNG Network along with other stakeholders, the Registrar General's Department announced their proposal to provide digital birth certificates with special sensitivity applied in omitting the marital status of parents and details of religion both of which were contentious issues for care leavers.

Housing needs of care leavers is another advocacy priority of the GNG Network, currently under discussion with the National Housing Development Authority. SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka provides close guidance and support in the operations of the network.

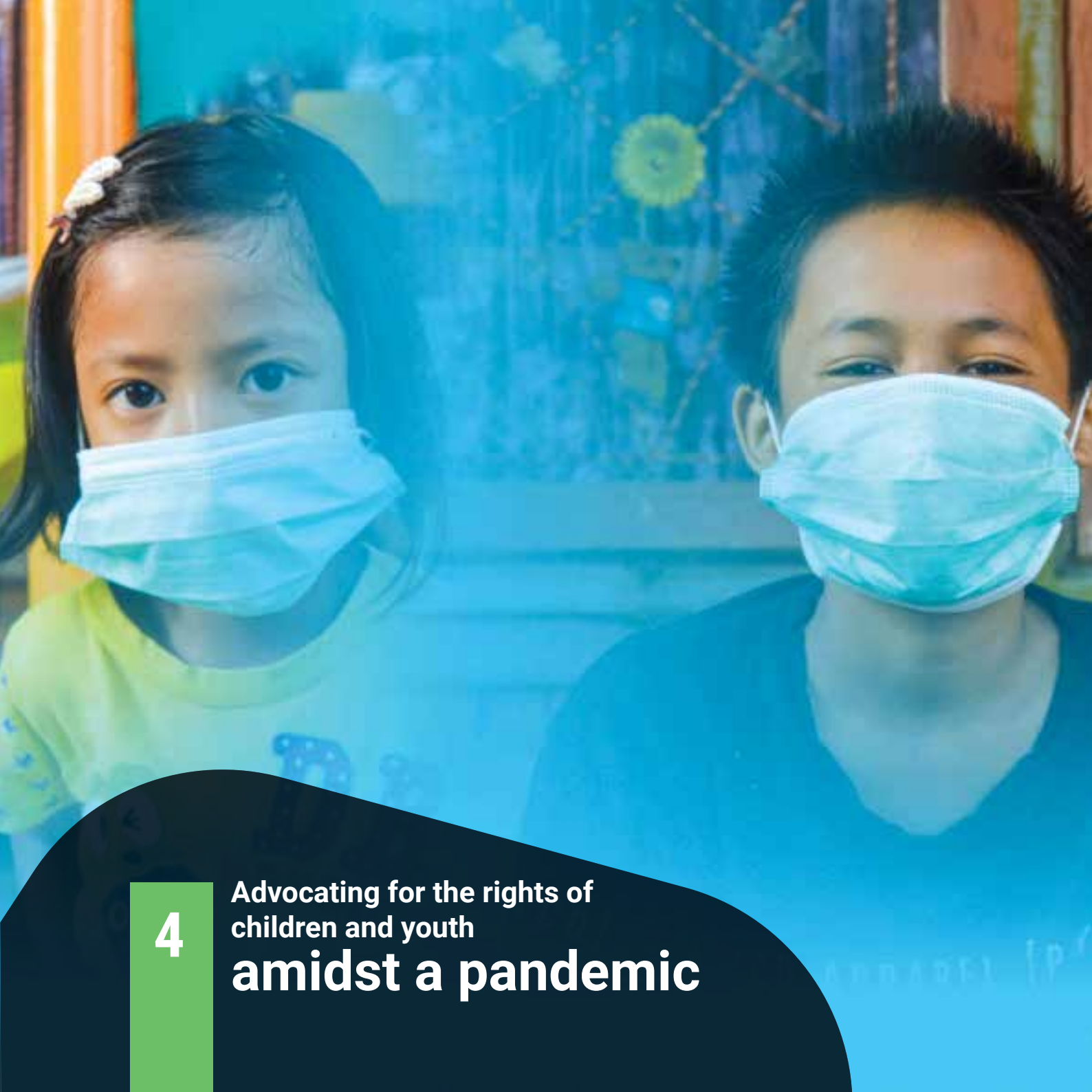
✉ gnglk.org@gmail.com

f www.facebook.com/GenNvrGiveUp/

🌐 [www://gnglk.org/#home](http://www.gnglk.org/#home)



GNG Network members presenting a proposal to address issues related to care leavers in Sri Lanka to the former Minister of Women and Child Affairs, at the Deinstitutionalization and Alternative Care conference organized by SOS Children's Villages in 2017 in collaboration with the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Women and Gender.



4

Advocating for the rights of
children and youth
amidst a pandemic

A spotlight on children in alternative care in Southeast Asia

SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia and the Southeast Asian member associations organized a virtual forum on July 28, 2020 to put a spotlight on the challenges faced by children without or at risk of losing parental care due to COVID-19. The forum was titled COVID-19 Response towards the Alternative Care of Children in Southeast Asia.

The forum focused on the impact of COVID-19 on children in alternative care, care-leavers, and caregivers; good practices and lessons learned in responding to and managing the COVID-19 crisis; and moving forward with alternative care in the new normal. The participating countries included Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The virtual forum was attended by 268 attendees, representing governments, United Nation (UN) bodies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and academia as well as children and youth both in care and care leavers from Asia, Europe and Africa.

The forum brought together speakers from the Southeast Asia region including children and young people in care, care leavers, caregivers, representatives of intergovernmental bodies such as the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) of Viet Nam and the Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia, and civil society stakeholders such as Child Rights Coalition (CRC) and Association of Child Caring Agencies of the Philippines (ACCAP).

Speaking out, young people in Asia asked for increased support for continuing education, finding jobs and affordable housing, and special support for those with disabilities in the wake of COVID-19, while highlighting their eagerness to engage with local authorities in their COVID responses.¹⁴

¹⁴ Visit <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/south-east-asia-forum-on-covid19-impact> for more information on the forum and its outcomes, and https://www.sosphilippines.org/blog/article/163/covid_19_response_towards_the_alternative_care_of_children_in_southeast_asia to read the policy brief.



Current challenges faced by the ASEAN region has underscored the need to strengthen regional cooperation towards realizing fundamental freedoms and ensuring the well-being of vulnerable children and women in ASEAN.

Yuyum Paryani, Indonesia representative to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), the highest inter-governmental body in the region working towards the realization of children's rights.

The “never give up” sprit

Care leavers in Sri Lanka understand how tough transition can be, when leaving alternative care to construct their independent lives. It is a phase when some fall between the cracks. This is what the care leavers were able to identify and to address as they banded together to form the Generation Never Give-up Network, now popularly known as the GNG Network.



Members of the GNG Network together with representatives of SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka, at their annual get-together in 2019

From its inception, this dynamic movement of young minds threw itself into advocacy on behalf of crucial needs of care leavers. One such momentous advocacy initiative was when GNG Network took on lobbying with the relevant government ministries, making them aware of sensitive areas in birth certificate production that warrant special requirements of children in alternative care. On the heels of this great success, the GNG Network rose high again during the desperate times of COVID. As soon as the lock downs started in Sri Lanka in March 2020, many young care leaves in the country were badly hit. Most were daily wage earners lost their income overnight. Some were stranded with no accommodation or in overcrowded rooms as they could not pay rent. Some did not have food to eat or a place to go to. But the GNG team was up and running instantly, reaching out to its members through social media. Simultaneously, a special meeting was convened with the 18+ Alliance members through skype to raise funds and coordinate the delivery of goods. Let us hear the story in the words of one of the many young people who benefitted greatly from the initiative.

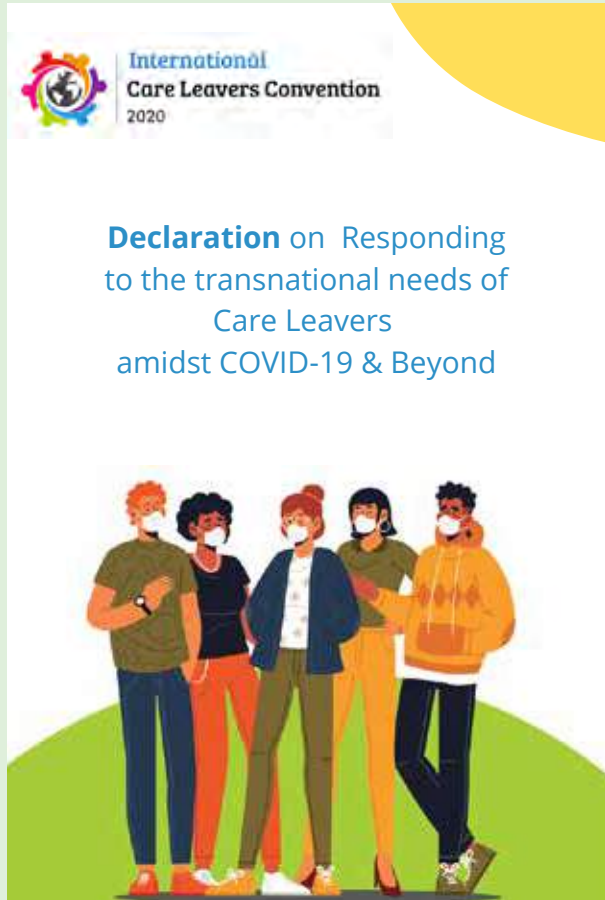
My Name is Roshan Pushpa kumara. Having grown up in SOS Children's Villages, I left care a while back, completed a university degree and am in the process of looking for steady employment. Life wasn't easy even before COVID hit us, as I had not yet found a stable job. I was living in a temple in a

southern village when COVID struck. Nothing could have prepared us for this. No one had experienced this type of global phenomenon, the lock downs and the devastating personal impact on so many. I too was left devastated economically, and faced a lot of hardships on a day to day basis. But help came from an unexpected place!

I am part of a group called the GNG Network. I never really believed in such networks as they don't last long nor are they helpful, but the GNG overturned this notion in my mind completely. The network quickly mobilized to make contact with all care leavers who were on their own and conducted a quick needs assessment. I too was located and I was so thrilled to know someone was looking out even for me. They provided much needed financial assistance in those difficult days. I learned that the GNG transferred emergency funds to 108 other care leavers like myself, and that food packs too were distributed to many others who needed it. That's not all, the GNG Network also advocated with the Department of Probation and Child Care Services to obtain a disaster relief allowance of 5000 rupees for care leavers who needed it.

I feel so proud to know our own care leavers did this for us. It showed me that even a person like me who grew up in alternative care has someone advocating on my behalf, even when the whole world is in turmoil.

The international care leaver's declaration on Responding to the Transnational Needs of Care Leavers Amidst COVID-19 and Beyond was developed by care leavers from across the globe in June 2020. Nearly 30 care leavers from eight SOS member associations in Asia contributed to this process. The declaration, endorsed by many organizations and care leavers' associations across the world, consists of 11 key recommendations around financial security, housing, education, accessibility, employability, psychosocial support, health, policy reform, participation, social networks, inclusion and social protection of care leavers during the pandemic and beyond. These recommendations are made to governments and other stakeholders, to ensure that care leavers feel supported during the current pandemic, and that issues affecting children and youth from alternative care settings globally are addressed. We call for your support for the implementation of these recommendations and their incorporation into national and organizational policies and plans.¹⁵



¹⁵ Visit <http://www.careleaversconvention.udayancare.in/index.php/declaration/> to read and/or endorse the declaration.

Powerful young campaigners

Over and over again, we have seen that advocacy which is done by children and young people themselves has tremendous potential for moving state mechanisms and policy makers in a far more powerful manner.

In a bid to promote child participation in COVID responses, Indonesia launched a powerful Child-led Campaign through their Joining Forces initiative, encouraging children to advocate for the fulfilment of their own rights with governments at all levels. Initiated and led by SOS Children's Villages Indonesia, the campaign drew in 36 children from the six Joining Forces partner organizations.

Child leaders in the Child-led Campaign had been in the process of talking to government representatives from the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MoWECP). Together, they had been trying to ascertain the underlying issues which make children susceptible to widespread socio-cultural and economic impacts of the COVID pandemic.

At one such discussion, the Deputy Assistant of the MoWECP invited these child leaders to form bonds and synergies with the National Child Forum which operates under the guidance of the MoWECP. The invitation demonstrated recognition that the campaign had national level potential. It also gave the children an opportunity to influence the development of the Indonesian Children's Voices, a document advocating for the rights and needs of children affected by COVID.

At the milestone virtual meeting organised by the MoWECP's National Child Forum in August 2020,

children from the Child-led Campaign successfully presented the issues and suggestions related to child rights in a pandemic context. The children's voices were blended with Indonesian Children's Voices, and were presented officially by the NCF to the Minister of MoWECP and the President of the country, in the final celebration event of 2020 National Children's Day.



In many ways, advocacy is tomorrow's child in a rapidly changing playground. We are aware of the many challenges and are already gearing up to meet and get beyond them. In this preparation for our tomorrow, we have identified needs for the future and are currently strategizing our actions.

A strong care reforms narrative. A narrative that is premised upon the *diversity of family* and promotes a range of alternative child care options. A narrative that is child-centric and perceives *quality care* from the perspective of the child.

Building a positive discourse, which promotes quality care across the continuum of care, whether it be in family of origin, alternative care or aftercare.

Enabling the vibrant new wave of our own SOS young people taking centre stage in advocacy together with peers from other child care settings, proving they are their own best advocates. We hope to strengthen and establish what has now begun; the galvanizing of children, youth and care leavers in speaking out loud.

5

Advocacy for tomorrow: Beyond 2020



Children from SOS Children's Villages Thailand presenting how they will ensure the basic rights of the country's citizens if they become the government of tomorrow, in a Happy Land where equality, inclusion and non-violence will rule



Taking collective advocacy to greater heights in the future. We aspire towards stronger advocacy partnerships with a wider range of stakeholders. We have, through the years galvanized our connections with crucial partners at every stratum from the grassroots to the global. We encourage and support the efforts of our member associations as they seek stronger collaborations with national and local governmental structures.

It is our aspiration in the future to enhance our engagement with and empowerment of members of the community in general, and members of the SOS care community in particular. We see opportunity in harnessing the commitment and hands-on experience of caregivers to become highly motivated advocates as well, on behalf of the children they invest their lives in. Creating sharper tools for educating and mobilizing key members of the caregiver community and other strategic communities we know will bring rich dividends in the future.

It is also our aspiration for the future to venture into the broader human rights dialogue in order to address the root causes of child-family separation, establishing ourselves as a leader, trendsetter and opinion shaper in the world of advocacy for child rights, protection and care.

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Youth from SOS Children's Villages Thailand, attending the Bangpoo Children and Youth Council meeting (local level) for the first time, voted for the agreement on the action plan of the council



"Different families but same love". An artistic expression by a child of SOS Children's Villages Philippines, a participant of the 'What is a Family?' study conducted by SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia



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