Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, please allow me to thank the Secretary General for all his reports under this agenda item. We would also like to thank all the speakers for their useful and informative presentations under this agenda item.

Mr. Chairman,

India’s commitment to children and their welfare and development is manifest in our commitment and ongoing efforts to meet the goals of ‘A World fit for Children’ and the related Millennium Development Goals.

Children in the age group 0-18 years constitute 44% of our total population. In our efforts to make this world a better place for our children to grow in, India has been relentless in her efforts to provide the highest possible standards in education, welfare and development for our children.
Mr Chairman,

Our flagship programme for children, namely the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, represents one of the world's largest and most unique programmes for Early Childhood Care and Education. This programme, on the one hand, provides pre-school non-formal education for children upto 6 years, on the other hand, breaks the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity and mortality by providing supplementary nutrition, immunization and periodic health checkup.

Last year alone, more than 71.8 million children and 15.7 million pregnant and lactating mothers benefited from this programme. As this programme has direct implication on the success of the MDG 4, (of reducing by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five), the financial allocation for this scheme has increased fourfold in the last 5 years to Rs 49 billion in 2009-10.

Mr Chairman,

One of the most notable progresses in India in the field of child development has been - education. By bringing into force the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in April this year, it is now an inalienable and justiciable right of all children to obtain free and compulsory education including, enrolment, attendance and completion of eight years of elementary education schooling till the age of 14 years.

This Act also requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats to children from poor families (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan). There is also a provision for special training of school dropouts to bring them at par with students of the same age. The Act also has a number of other provisions
regarding improvement of school infrastructure and teacher-student ratio. The National Council for the Protection of Child Rights, along with various Commissions set up by the State Governments will monitor the implementation of this Act.

Notwithstanding this, our Universal Elementary Education Scheme (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) has also been expanded to cover the entire country to reduce out-of-school children as well as to emphasis on the girl child’s education.

The government has also committed increased spending on education. In order to attain universal education, 6% of India’s GDP for the period 2007 to 2012 has been allocated for education and there has been an increase of 16 % in the Union Budget (2010-11) for school education.

Mr Chairman,

Last year, government of India launched a new scheme called the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) to create a safe environment for children in need of care and protection, children in conflict and contact with law and any other vulnerable child. This scheme brought under one umbrella several existing schemes of child protection, namely, a) A Programme for Juvenile Justice; b) An Integrated Programme for Street Children; and c) Scheme for Assistance to Homes to Promote In-country Adoption.

The primary focus of this new scheme is to provide quality and better accessible child protection services; to raise public awareness about child rights; to clearly articulate responsibilities and enforced accountability for child protection; and to establish functioning structures at all government levels for delivery of statutory and support services to children in difficult times. One of the important and innovative elements of this scheme has been the commencement of a dedicated 24 hours toll free telephone helpline service for all children in distress or to adults on behalf of children in distress. At present this service is available in 83 cities and is being gradually expanded to other parts of the country.

Mr Chairman,

A special mention of girl child deserves your attention. The girl child is one of the most vulnerable members of any society. A number of initiatives to enhance the status of the girl child have been initiated in India. Starting from effective policies to ban of sex selective abortion and child marriage, since 2009, every year January 24 is marked as “National Girl Child Day” in India to highlight the different problems faced by the girl child and the need to spread gender sensitization amongst various sections of the society.

Mr Chairman,
We are also cognizant of the fact that our children should not be engaged in any form of hard labour at the cost of their right to education. India is strictly enforcing a ban on employment of children less than 14 years as domestic help or at eateries by way of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act. Child labour is intrinsically linked to the intricate web of social problems that children living in poverty are subject to. We believe that any strategy to completely eliminate all forms of child labour must be a holistic effort that targets health, nutrition, poverty and education for children.

Ending exploitation and violence against children is fundamental to ensuring a healthy future for every child. In this connection, India has set up a National Commission for Protection of Child’s Rights in 2007 to provide speedy trial of offenders committing crimes against children and violating the rights of children.

Mr Chairman,

Before I conclude, let me reiterate India’s firm commitment to work towards not only complete realisation of the goals of ‘A World Fit for Children’ and the realisation of all the related Millennium Development Goals but also higher standards of physical, social, emotional and psychological life for each and every child in India. They are indeed our future. Let us strive to provide them the best.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.