

# “Our Rights and Future” Depend on Collective Efforts

## **International Human Rights Day in Today's India**

International Human Rights Day, observed on December 10<sup>th</sup> each year, holds critical importance in the socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts of India. Despite India's progress in various sectors, significant challenges persist in safeguarding human rights, particularly in states like Andhra Pradesh, where marginalized groups continue to face systemic inequalities.

### **Socio-economic Issues**

India is home to over 1.4 billion people, with significant disparities in income and access to basic services. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), about 28% of India's population lives below the poverty line, struggling to access basic human rights such as healthcare, education, and clean water. In Andhra Pradesh, the rural-urban divide remains pronounced, with poverty rates being higher in rural areas. The state also struggles with child malnutrition, with 38% of children under the age of five facing stunting. These socio-economic challenges undermine the ability of people, especially from marginalized groups, to fully realize their human rights, limiting their opportunities for economic mobility and well-being.

### **Political Issues**

Human rights violations in India are often linked to political issues such as land rights, displacement, and conflicts. In Andhra Pradesh, land acquisition for infrastructure and industrial projects has led to the displacement of tribal communities, threatening their access to land, livelihood, and cultural heritage. According to reports from the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, nearly 45% of tribal people in the state have faced displacement due to such projects, often without adequate compensation or rehabilitation. These violations continue to hinder the political rights of these communities, impeding their participation in decision-making processes.

### **Cultural Issues**

Cultural norms in India also impact human rights, particularly gender equality. Despite legal protections, violence against women remains widespread. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Andhra Pradesh recorded 15,472 cases of crimes against women in 2021. This includes domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual assault, pointing to deep-rooted societal attitudes that undermine women's rights.

### **Practice of Child Marriages**

Child marriages remain prevalent in Palnadu district, Andhra Pradesh, with approximately 28-30% of marriages involving girls under 18. This practice persists due to socio-economic challenges such as poverty, lack of education, and entrenched cultural norms. Many parents, driven by fears of societal judgment and financial strain, view early marriage as a solution to secure their daughters' futures and uphold family reputation. Surveys indicate that 65% of parents prioritize family honour over the well-being of their daughters, leading to consequences like school dropouts—nearly 50% among married girls under 18 in neighbouring Guntur district—and heightened health risks from early pregnancies.

Child abuse and human rights violations are critical issues in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in Palnadu District. Recent incidents reveal ongoing problems of abuse and negligence during the post-rescue phase, compromising children's safety. Although initiatives like child protection committees and village vigilance groups are being established to combat child exploitation and foster safer environments, challenges remain in adequately protecting children's rights and well-being.

Despite efforts by NGOs and government initiatives to reduce child marriages, progress has been slow. Awareness campaigns have helped decrease cases by 10-15% in some areas, but comprehensive education, economic support, and cultural shifts are needed to break this cycle and improve opportunities for young girls in the region.

### **Interfaith Peace in India: A Fracturing Social Fabric**

As the world observes International Human Rights Day, the state of interfaith peace in India serves as a poignant reminder of the work that remains to be done in upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals, regardless of their faith, caste, or creed. Interfaith peace in India is facing significant challenges, exacerbated by the current political climate. The country's diverse population has always been a complex tapestry, but recent events have escalated tensions. Indians value religious tolerance, but segregation and polarization are on the rise. This segregation extends to public spaces, where different groups interact minimally. As we observe International Human Rights Day, it is essential to acknowledge these challenges and reaffirm our commitment to promoting understanding, acceptance, and inclusivity, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all individuals are respected and protected.

On International Human Rights Day, it is essential to reflect on these ongoing challenges and reaffirm India's commitment to ensuring dignity, equality, and justice for all citizens, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable.

## **International Human Rights Day at Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, Andhra Pradesh, India**

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, along with their Partners-in-Mission, are deeply committed to the empowerment of women and children. They actively engage in raising awareness within the community through various initiatives, including the observance of significant national and international days. These observances serve as a platform to educate and sensitize the community about pressing social issues.

This year, the Sisters invited district-level authorities who work closely with women and children to share insights into the challenges faced by these vulnerable groups and discuss solutions aligned with international human rights principles.

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Good Shepherd community hosted a program for 43 adolescent girls, 241 women, and 29 men from Amaravati, Krosuru, and Pethakurapadu mandals, in celebration of International Human Rights Day. Mr. Thandu Laxman, a Social Worker of the Good Shepherd Convent in Amaravathi, served as the Master of Ceremonies, skilfully guiding the event with his eloquence and engaging presence. Distinguished speakers addressed the audience, highlighting

critical issues and empowering them to address challenges through informed action and collaboration.

Following are the special guests invited for the International Human Rights Day 2024:

- **Mrs. T. Leelavathi**, Secretary cum Civil Judge (Senior Division), District Legal Services Authority Guntur
- **Mrs. Bharathi**, Supervisor, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Amaravathi Cluster
- **Mr. Showry Raju**, District Child Protection Officer, (DCPO), Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh
- **Mr. Krishna**, Child Protection Officer, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Palnadu District
- **Mr. Thirupathi Rao**, State Coordinator, *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (BBA; *Save Childhood Movement*)
- **Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi**, Director of Community Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi

What follows in this document is a detailed account of their thorough deliberation and discussions that took place on this significant occasion known as International Human Rights Day 2024:

#### **Mr. Thirupathi Rao, State Coordinator, *Save Childhood Movement***

*Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (BBA; *Save Childhood Movement*) is an India-based children's rights movement in which Mr. Thirupathi Rao works as State Coordinator. The movement was started in 1980 by Nobel Laureate Mr. Kailash Satyarthi. It campaigns against bonded labour, child labour and human trafficking, and promotes the right to education for all children. It has so far freed close to 100,000 children from servitude, including bonded labourers, and helped in their re-integration, rehabilitation and education. Mr. Thirupathi Rao who is one of the close associates of Sisters of the Good Shepherd in his speech appreciated the inclusive and integrated approach to human rights.

#### ***Upholding Human Rights for All***

Mr. Thirupathi Rao emphasizes that human rights encompass all aspects of protecting human life. It is crucial to safeguard the rights of children and other vulnerable individuals, and every person must take on this responsibility as a duty. In our society, issues such as child labour, trafficking, child marriages, and sexual abuse persist, making it imperative for everyone to work towards protecting the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable.

#### ***Personal Responsibility in Child Rights Protection***

Everyone has a personal duty to uphold and safeguard children's rights. It is essential to take proactive responsibility rather than shifting blame onto others for any harm or abuse experienced by children. By fostering a sense of accountability, individuals can contribute to creating a safe and nurturing environment where children's well-being is prioritized. Recognizing that abuse stems from neglect or harmful actions reinforces the importance of vigilance and intervention. Every person can play a role in protecting children by standing against abuse, advocating for their rights, and ensuring they grow in a secure and supportive atmosphere free from harm.

### ***Collective Responsibility to End Child Abuse and Child Marriages***

Addressing the critical issues of child abuse and child marriages is a duty that belongs to each and every one of us in society. We all have a role to play in protecting the vulnerable members of our community, particularly children. By taking proactive measures, such as creating and promoting toll-free numbers like 1098 or 15100, we can facilitate immediate reporting of these serious concerns. When individuals reach out to these dedicated helplines, it enables the appropriate authorities to step in and take swift action to resolve the situation at hand. Mr. Thirupathi Rao emphasizes that our collective efforts in utilizing these resources can significantly contribute to the overall resolution of these pressing problems. It is essential that we unite in this cause to ensure the safety and well-being of every child, guiding them towards a brighter and more secure future.

### ***The Urgent Need for Family Vigilance Against Abuse***

As per some statistics, Mr. Thirupathi Rao says that almost 97 percent of the reported abuses against female children are carried out by individuals who are close family members or relatives. This alarming statistic highlights the critical need for parents to be particularly watchful and alert when it comes to the safety and well-being of their daughters. It's imperative that they take proactive measures to protect their children from potential harm that could arise from those who are meant to care for and support them.

**Mr. Showry Raju, District Child Protection Officer, (DCPO), Palnadu District**

### ***Human Rights Day is a Time for Celebration***

Mr. Showry Raju, District Child Protection Officer, (DCPO), Child Rights Protection Unit (CRPU), Palnadu District in his opening statement appreciated that the adolescent girls gathered are quite thorough with the four rights, namely, 'rights to life, rights to protection, rights to development, and rights participation' referred in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UN CRC). He said that today is a day of Celebration of Human Rights and the Children's Rights are Human Rights too. He briefed the participants about the 30 articles referred in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UN DHR) which is the foundation for the all the human rights and the laws being created in many countries. He said that 30 Articles in the UN DHR are classified as Civil and political rights, such as the rights to life, liberty, free speech, and privacy, alongside economic, social, and cultural rights, including the rights to social security, health, and education.

### ***The Complex Dynamics of Trust and Responsibility***

To engage the participants, he shared a true story about a 15-year-old girl who was trafficked by a young man. He took a selfie with her and threatened to show it to her parents, claiming they were in a close relationship. Isolated by the youth, who stalked her daily, the girl did not confide in her parents. This continued through her Intermediate studies, prompting her parents to consider sending her to a hostel and even buying her a mobile phone. Ultimately, out of fear, she succumbed to his demands and became involved in sexual activities with him. The youth later shared compromising photos with friends, which her parents discovered when they noticed her spending time with other boys. Mr. Showry then posed a question to the participants: who should be blamed—the girl or her parents? The consensus was that the primary fault lay with the parents for failing to monitor their daughter's behaviour.

This incident underscores critical issues surrounding trust, communication, and safety in young people's peer interactions. While parental oversight of children's social interactions is essential, it is equally important to acknowledge the manipulative behaviour of the youth involved. Blaming only the parents overlooks the predatory nature of such actions and the psychological manipulation that can occur in relationships. Open discussions between parents and children about boundaries, consent, and the dangers of sharing personal information online are vital. This education can empower young people to make safer choices and recognize unhealthy relationships. Addressing this multifaceted issue requires a balance of parental guidance, awareness of exploitation risks, and support systems for young people in precarious situations.

### ***Empowering Communities to Protect Human Rights***

Mr. Showry encouraged attendees of the International Human Rights celebration to become 'social animators,' highlighting the importance of engaged, community-focused individuals who motivate others to take action. He stressed that citizens must proactively safeguard one another in society to prevent wrongdoing. Human rights violations often begin within families, making it critical for individuals to ensure that no one falls victim to such abuses. We must recognize and support vulnerable individuals and communities susceptible to exploitation. This includes ensuring that no child experiences abuse, is denied an education, or becomes a victim of child marriage in our villages.

### ***The Inherent and Inalienable Essence of Rights***

Mr. Showry eloquently asserted that rights are “*inherent and inalienable*”, emphasizing their fundamental nature as intrinsic to the dignity of every individual. These rights are not mere privileges granted by authorities but are the bedrock of justice and equality, essential to the human condition.

They transcend borders, cultures, and eras, forming a universal declaration of humanity. No governing body or institution possesses the moral authority to grant or revoke these rights, as they are deeply embedded in the fabric of existence itself. Throughout history, the enduring struggles of countless individuals have echoed this truth, affirming the timeless value of recognition, respect, and freedom for all.

This perspective underscores the enduring significance of rights as a shared heritage and an unwavering commitment to human dignity.

### ***Safeguarding Vulnerable Individuals from Abuse and Violence***

It is imperative to protect vulnerable individuals, including children and adults in at-risk situations, from abuse and violence. These individuals must be identified promptly and moved from unsafe environments to secure and supportive spaces.

For instance, young girls subjected to child marriage must be identified and safeguarded without delay. To report such cases or seek assistance, free toll numbers like 1098 or 15100 should be contacted immediately.

Together, we can ensure the safety and dignity of those in need.

**Mr. Krishna, Child Protection Officer, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Palnadu District**

***Legal Framework***

Mr. Krishna elaborated on the key aspects of the Child Marriage Prevention Act during his presentation, providing a detailed overview of the legal provisions. He outlined the specific penalties for those involved in promoting or facilitating child marriages, highlighting the severity of the consequences for those who violate the law.

***Rehabilitation and Support***

In addition to explaining the legal framework, Mr. Krishna also highlighted the available rehabilitation measures for victims of child marriage. He detailed the processes designed to support and reintegrate them into society, providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms in place to safeguard the rights and well-being of affected children. His explanation shed light on the importance of not only preventing child marriages but also providing a supportive environment for those who have been impacted by this practice.

**Mrs. Bharathi, Supervisor, Child Protection Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Amaravathi Cluster**

***Relevance of Fostering Human Rights at Home***

On International Human Rights Day, 2024, Mrs. Bharathi emphasized the crucial role of families in instilling human rights values in children. At the Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, she stressed that parents are the primary teachers of human rights, and it is their responsibility to educate their children on these fundamental principles. By doing so, families can lay the foundation for a society that values dignity, equality, and justice. Mrs. Bharathi encouraged parents to engage in open discussions with their children, promoting empathy, respect, and understanding of human rights, ultimately shaping a more compassionate and equitable world.

**Mrs.T. Leelavathi, Secretary cum Civil Judge (Senior Division), District Legal Services Authority, Guntur**

***Human Rights for All***

“Our Rights, Rights Now,” can only be realized through collective efforts. She stated that a better future is achievable only through the collaboration of government departments, non-government organizations, and people’s organizations.

***Foundation of Human Rights***

She further emphasized her belief that the foundation of all human rights begins with the fundamental 'Right to Life.' However, she maintained that this right must not exist in isolation; it should be accompanied by the principle of 'Life with Dignity.' In her view, these two concepts are inherently linked and essential for ensuring that all individuals can lead lives that are not only alive but also meaningful and respectful.

***The Inherent Right to Life***

She continued to emphasize that human rights begin with the fundamental right to life, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This inherent right to life encompasses not only the absence of violence, but also the

presence of basic necessities such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare. To live means to live freely and with dignity, free from discrimination, poverty, and violence.

### ***Collective Responsibility***

Reflecting on the 2024 theme, A Call for Collective Responsibility, Mrs. Leelavathi highlighted the universality of human rights and the need for a united commitment to protect these rights for all, regardless of caste, creed, gender, or economic status. Drawing from her experience, she underscored the importance of legal aid and awareness in empowering marginalized communities, many of whom lack knowledge or access to justice. She called for collective action to make dignity, equality, and justice tangible realities, particularly in protecting the rights of women, children, and the differently-abled, aligning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Community Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi**

### ***Unifying for Human Rights***

Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Community Development Programmes, underscored the transformative power of unity in advancing the cause of human rights. She emphasized that collective action and a shared commitment to promoting dignity, equality, and justice can drive lasting change, fostering a more compassionate and equitable society. By standing together, individuals and communities can amplify their voices, challenge injustices, and create a ripple effect of positive transformation, ultimately ensuring that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled for all. Sr. Vinnarasi expressed heartfelt gratitude to the chief guests, including Civil Judge Mrs. T. Leelavathi, and applauded the women and adolescent girls who actively participated in the event. Acknowledging their commitment, she lauded them as torchbearers in the ongoing struggle for human rights and social justice. She invited all participants to a fraternal meal after the program at 2:23 pm and urged attendees to advocate for equality and dignity, emphasizing that sustainable development is linked to the protection and promotion of human rights for everyone in society.

*Documented by*

**Mr. Ayyadurai John Aruldass, Partner-in-Mission,  
Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi**



## PHOTOGRAPHS



As a sign of auspicious beginning of the celebration of the International Human Rights Day on 10th December 2024, Mrs. Bharathi, Supervisor, Child Protection Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Amaravathi Cluster, and Other Key Invitees Light the Lamp



Mr. Laxman, Social Worker of Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, served as the Master of Ceremony, showcasing his eloquent coordinating skills.





**Mr. Thirupathi Rao, State Coordinator, Save Childhood Movement, says that Everyone has a personal duty to uphold and safeguard human rights.**





**Mr. Showry Raju, District Child Protection Officer, (DCPO), Palnadu District says that humn rights are “inherent and inalienable”, emphasizing their fundamental nature as intrinsic to the dignity of every individual.**





**Mr. Krishna, Child Protection Officer, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Palnadu District says that in the event of child marriages, the girl children are provided with necessary rehabilitation and support services**





**Mrs. Bharathi, Supervisor, Child Protection Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Amaravathi Cluster, emphasized that families can lay the foundation for a society that values dignity, equality, and justice.**





**Mrs. Smt. T. Leelavathi, Secretary cum Civil Judge (Senior Division), District Legal Services Authority, Guntur, says that the theme of the International Human Rights Day “Our Rights, Rights Now,” can only be realized through collective efforts.**





**Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Community Development Programmes, underscored the transformative power of unity in advancing human rights.**



**Participants of the International Human Rights Day 2024 took a solemn oath, pledging to never be complicit in any human rights violation and to become ardent advocates for the protection and promotion of human rights.**



**Adolescent girls express their solidarity and reaffirm their commitment, alongside special invitees, to uphold human rights**





**Felicitations to Mrs. T. Leelavathi, Secretary cum Civil Judge (Senior Division), District Legal Services Authority Guntur for her contribution towards human rights by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi**

**A moment of appreciation and pride over the contribution by the Human Rights Activists**

**The Sisters of The Good Shepherd, Amaravathi, proudly felicitated Mr. Showry Raju, District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh, in recognition of his exceptional dedication to the cause of human rights.**

**Mr. Showry's tireless efforts as an ardent advocate for the protection and promotion of human rights have made a significant impact, inspiring others to join the quest for a more just and equitable society.**



**The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi, proudly felicitate Mrs. Bharathi, Supervisor of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Amaravathi Cluster, in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the advancement of human rights.**

**It was a moment of joy and heartfelt appreciation for her tireless efforts in building a more just and equitable society.**



The Sisters of The Good Shepherd, Amaravathi, humbly honor Mr. Thirupathi Rao, State Coordinator, *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (BBA; Save Childhood Movement), for his tireless efforts in promoting the rights of vulnerable children.

May his remarkable contribution continue to inspire positive change, reaching many more lives in the state of Andhra Pradesh and fostering a brighter future for generations to come.



The Sisters of The Good Shepherd, Amaravathi, humbly honor Mr. Krishna, Child Protection Officer, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Palnadu District, for his selfless commitment to the noble cause of human rights.

The unwavering passion and dedication of Mr. Krishna to protecting and promoting the rights of the vulnerable have earned him a special place in the hearts of all who strive for a more just and compassionate society.

The Key Invitees proudly honor Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Community Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, for her exceptional leadership and diplomatic efforts in organizing a successful International Human Rights Day 2024 celebration.

May her mission to promote human rights, dignity, and justice continue to inspire and uplift countless lives, and may her tireless work be blessed with success and fulfillment.





The Key Invitees humbly honor Sr. Gracy, Sub-Site Director of CHALICE Educational and Community Sponsorship Program, for her invaluable collaboration with Sr. Vinnarasi in organizing a successful International Human Rights Day celebration at the Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi. Her dedication and hard work have contributed significantly to the event's success, and her commitment to promoting human rights is truly appreciated.



Mr. Babu, Social Worker of Good Shepherd Convent, extended heartfelt gratitude to special invitees and participants of International Human Rights Day 2024, acknowledging the collective efforts that made the event a success at the Good Shepherd Convent Premises, Amaravathi, on 10th December 2024.

