

## ***The Stage for Emerging Leadership***

### ***The National Convention of the Human Rights Clubs in Schools.***

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They came from the districts of the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana; they who were elected to the district committees by block level functionaries of human rights clubs set up by People's Action For Rural Awakening in over 587 government schools across the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They came together to elect their leaders for the state level committees of the federation of human rights clubs in government schools guided by Fr. John Tharakan. The Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state committees were set up and from these the National Committee of Human Rights Clubs Federation.

Human Rights Club members had been very active and visible at their school level and as participants of state, national and international campaigns. The time was ripe to create for them space and visibility the state level to enhance their leadership capacity. With this intent the National convention of the "Human Rights Clubs in Schools" was held on 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016 at Navajeevan, Ramanthapur, Hyderabad. The Human Rights clubs is part of PARA's "Human Rights Education" Programme in cooperation with the UN sponsored "Institute of Human Rights Education (IHRE)". PARA has now federated the 759 Human Rights Clubs in 587 Schools involving 32420 students in the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The National Convention was held to elect the state committees of the federation of human rights clubs and also the national committee.

During the convention the student club members took pride in reporting a vast list of HR activities they got involved in. They had many success stories to share. These club activities made the National Nine Is Mine Campaign take notice of the potential of such clubs and invite Sadhiq Pasha, a club member from the Rotary Nagar Zilla Parishat H.School club Khammam to be part of the Indian delegation of children to attend the UN Summit on Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015.

A prominent, successful, Human Right activity the HR club members shared was the prevention of child marriages. It is a well known fact that some High school girl students are married off before they can complete the X class. The reasons are many. The news usually is known to her friends in advance and usually teachers and students do nothing about it and after marriage takes place not much can be done. Therefore prevention is the solution. Club members reported the prevention of child marriages by informing the Head Master, The Anganwadi worker, the Panchayat, the police, informing child line using the toll free number 1088 and so on. The HR club members reported the prevention of a number of child marriages in the schools of the 11 districts where HR club are functional.

Another common HR activity they reported was bringing back students who had dropped out of school. It is a known fact that 50% of the students drop out of school before completing X class. The information of a student about to leave the school is best known to his/her friends. The whereabouts of the student after he/she leaves the school is known to them. The Club members

were able to talk to the parents and convince many students who had dropped out of school to return back to school.

Another prominent HR activity was to facilitate the provision of some of the essential facilities that should be available in a school. Drinking water, midday meals, functional toilets, school buildings properly maintained, library play materials .....The Club creates a forum for students to exercise their "Right to Participation" which means that they can express their opinion freely and fearlessly. Coupled with this is the right to be heard. Making use of these Rights, the club members passed resolution in the club meeting and requested the Head Masters /principals for these missing, malfunctioning facilities. Many Head Masters heard the requests of the students and improved the water supply, toilets, midday meals, and other essential facilities in the schools.

Earlier in the morning the Convention was inaugurated Fr. M.C. George, the Director of BoscoNet, New Delhi. Dr.Mazher Hussein of COVA and Prof.Ratnakar of Urdu University, the members of the State Advisory Committee for HRE added value to the proceedings with their gracious presence with Fr.Bellamkonda Sudhakar and Bro.Vincent Castellino playing the role of welcoming hosts.

In the Evening the Mandal and district delegates got an opportunity to share their achievements with other state and national Human Rights activists. This session was chaired by the federation presidents of Telengana and Andhra Pradesh Mr. S. Sambath Mr. B.Vinod and vice presidents Ms. T. Sailu and Ms. Bhagyaeani. The chief guest was Smt. Vasanthi Devi Former Vice chancellor of Manonmaniam University and chair person of Tamilnadu Women's commission. The occasion was also graced by the presence of Fr.Thathireddy Vijayabhaskar Reddy, the provincial of Hyderabad Province, Smt.Chaya Ratan IAS (Retd) the former Special Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh. The chief guest, the other guests and the audience keenly listened to the many success stories of the HR Delegates of the two states. Smt. Vasanthi Devi concluded praising the HR club members for their many achievements. She said Human Rights education is an integral part of school education. These HR club members studying in Government schools have demonstrated how it can be done in a very practical way. The governments need to take over the Human Rights education programme and implement it in all the schools.

On 22 the HR delegates participated in a session on the SDGs and child rights facilitated by Mr. Denzil, the coordinator of the "Nine is Mine" programme. After lunch the delegates moved to the Indira Priyadarshini auditorium at Public gardens Hyderabad for the Valedictory function. The finance Minister of Telanagana State Mr. Etela Rajendran and Smt. Vasanthi Devi were guests of honour. The national president of the HR club federation Mr. B.Sambath and vice president S. Sowjanya presided. Smt. Vasanthi Devi praised the Telangana Government which took office after a long struggle for "self respect", a basic Human Right. Now it should carry forward this culture of Human rights which the HR club members have created in the schools. The finance minister said that the corporate sector had changed the concept of Education and removed all trace of Human rights from the system. Marks and ranks are only one aspect of education. There are many other aspects to the development of a full Human being.

The National Convention opened new vistas for the members of the human rights clubs to exercise their leadership and to add content to their motto "we are today's citizens and not of tomorrow".

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