

# SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

(PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE)

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Juvenile Justice Committee takes stock of child care, protection, and their well-being during COVID-19 second wave**

A review meeting was called by the Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee (SCJJC). The meeting was chaired by chairperson of the SCJJC and Members of Juvenile Justice Committees of High Courts and representatives of Union & State government attended the meeting and discussed the measures taken for the care, protection and well-being of the children during the second wave of COVID-19 and deliberated upon the possible measures and action to provide better care, protection and ensure the wellbeing of the children during this difficult time.

**NEW DELHI, 5 May 2021:** The Juvenile Justice Committee of the Supreme Court of India in coordination with UNICEF held a review meeting and take stock of actions taken by various states on child care, protection and wellbeing of the children during the second wave of the COVID-19 and deliberated upon the possible measures and actions need to be taken to ensure that every child in need gets appropriate care and protection during this difficult time.

The review meeting was held with the Chairpersons and Members of Juvenile Justice Committees of various High Courts. The conference was also attended by the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Govt. of India and officials of Departments of Women and Child Development/Social Welfare Departments, Health Department from various states and union territories.

**Mr. Justice S. Ravindra Bhat**, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Chair of the Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee has emphasized the need to step up the measures to ensure better care, protection, and well-being of the children during the second wave of COVID-19. The chairperson said that some children have lost either one or both parents to COVID-19 and there are children without parental supervision and care when their parent/s are in hospital or under medical care. These children are more vulnerable now than ever before. Concerted efforts should be made by all the key stakeholders to ensure the care and protection of children during the second wave of COVID. Justice Bhat further stated to develop a mechanism to address interim care needs of orphan, separated, or unaccompanied children, including clear guidance on steps to be taken in the event such a child has been exposed or has symptoms of the virus and requires a period of isolation and treatment. He further emphasized that care givers and employees of care institutions- both government managed and private, should be vaccinated, as frontline professionals and also that the services of these institutions should be declared as essential services.

In the review meeting, judges of all High Courts and officials of various States/Union Territories presented the measures which are being undertaken for care, protection, and well-being of the children during the second wave of COVID. Some of the measures by the state and union territories are setting up a state-level nodal officers and district task force for rapid response for care and protection children during the current pandemic, sponsorship for the children lost parent/s or the bread earners lost income or facing economic hardship. High Court juvenile justice committees represented by judges, as well as state and Union Territories also highlighted the measures they are taking to stop the spread of COVID-19 in child care institutions and the medical treatment and care of the children who contracted the disease.

**Ms. Aastha Khatwani, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India** said, “considering the emergency need, Ministry has issued the advisory to stop illegal adoption and care and protection of the children who have lost one either or both the parents to COVID”. She further added that Ministry has developed clear, coordinated, easy to understand, community messaging on children's unique risks, vulnerabilities and need of care and protection during COVID-19 and these messages are disseminated and broadcast through social media and other channels.

**Ms. Vandhana Kandhari**, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF India highlighted “in most cases, parents will be able to rely on other family members and relatives to step in to care for their children when they are in hospital or under medical care; however, in some cases, alternative care arrangements will be needed. Efforts to pre-emptively scale up the capacity of family-based care and social protection systems are critical to enhance family resilience and prevent unnecessary recourse to residential care”. Ms. Kandhari further added, “In order to provide interim care to the children, extended family members, trusted friends, good neighbours and or community members can be declared “fit person”

Some key priorities outlined by **Mr. Justice Bhat** are - Screening/testing and medical care for the children in the institutional care, provision of emergency medicine, supplies, emergency access to hospitals, etc and a roster of doctors available for tele-consultation for reach CCIs and on priority, vaccination of all staff working in the Child Care Institutions and other frontline Child Protection workers. Nomination of state and district level nodal officers empowered to take decisions and constitute a task force for rapid emergency response for children during COVID-19 was also highlighted. With respect to the needs of orphaned children, the chairperson reiterated that a co-ordinated response, in each district, by a committee comprised of the nodal officer (including the DM or SDM) a representative of the concerned CWC, and the District Legal Service authority representative, to ensure temporary foster homes as well as gather and secure all information relating to the deceased parent or parent, for future use should be set up. Each district CWC should compile all the details of such children, and their needs.

**Mr. Justice Bhat** in his concluding remarks stated “prevention of and response to the second wave of COVID surge requires close coordination and collaboration between child protection system and health system, a multi-sectoral response ensures that children and care givers’ need are address holistically and it leads to a better outcome for children.”

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