

**THURSDAY 23 JUNE 2022**

2HRS 11:00-13:00 GMT | 15:00-17:00 HK | 12:30-14:30 IST  
Chaired by Dr Rinchen Chopel – UNCRF member



A Roundtable on Human Rights and Alternative Care in Asia  
An initiative of BICON - the Biennial Conference on Alternative Care in Asia

# REPORT





## INTRODUCTION

BICON is an inter-agency cooperation of 8 leading international NGOs focused on alternative care for children; Better Care Network, Family for Every Child, Forget Me Not, Hope and Homes for Children, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International (Asia Office), Udayan Care, and Lumos. Since 2014, BICON has been a leading conference focussed on the rights of children and young people without parental care (CWPC). The 2021 event was hosted online, with practitioners, policymakers, academics, and young people with lived experience of care coming together to discuss regional challenges, best practices, and emerging issues related to alternative care reform and children's rights in Asia. More than 300 delegates from across the globe participated in a series of interactive workshops, plenaries and panel discussions - the final report featured recommendations for action that reflect the discussions. Among these recommendations was a strong call for countries across Asia to take up the cause.

The BICON organising committee invited representatives of Human Rights Commissions, Child Rights Commissions and similar entities to a 'virtual' roundtable discussion on 23 June 2022. This round table was intended to spark practical conversations among peers from across Asia that reflect the outcomes of the 4th Biennial Conference on Alternative Care for Children in Asia (BICON) which took place in December 2021 and also amplify the reflections and recommendations of the 2021 UN Day of General Discussion (DGD) on Children's Rights and Alternative Care from September 2021.

The roundtable offered a valuable opportunity for sharing eight different national perspectives and to generate collective approaches and demonstrate commitment and action towards implementing the DGD recommendations.

This report is not intended to be a record of everything that was shared but to highlight points of interest, challenges and potential areas of consensus.



## PARTICIPANTS

1. **Rabiul Islam** - Deputy Director and Member Secretary of the Child Rights Committee of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh
2. **Ugyen Tshomo** - Acting Director General from National Commission for Women and Children, Bhutan
3. **Yeshey Lham** - Chief of Children Division from National Commission for Women and Children, Bhutan
4. **Khamsouk Somphavong** - Deputy Director, Division of Child Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Victims, Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Laos
5. **Pisay Souavansay** - UNICEF, Laos
6. **Aminath Rishmee Amir** - Director General from Child and Family Protection Service, Maldives
7. **Fathimath Barra Ibrahim** - Assistant Director Advocacy and Awareness from Child and Family Protection Service, Maldives
8. **Samaau A Najeeb** - Member of Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
9. **Muruthula Moosa** - Executive Committee Member of Advocating the Rights of Children, Maldives
10. **Lily Thapa** - Member of National Human Rights Commission, Nepal
11. **Professor Farkhanda Aurangzeb** - Senior Consultant Human Rights Education from National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan
12. **Iqbal Ahmed Detho** - Member of National Commission on the Rights of Child, Pakistan
13. **Syed Ishtiaq Gilani** - Chairman of National Action and Coordination Group, Pakistan
14. **Dr. Rubina Feroz Bhatti** - Member of National Commission on the Rights of Child, Pakistan
15. **Mehwish Kayani** - Coordinator of National Action and Coordination Group, Pakistan
16. **Lakmal Ponnampereuma** - Clinical Psychologist, National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka
17. **Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka**
18. **Prachumporn Chaiyarat** - Human Rights Officer from the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand
19. **Mikiko Otani** - Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
20. **Dr. Rinchen Chopel** - SAIEVAC/CRC
21. **Karishma Singh** - Care Leavers Association and Network (CLAN), India
22. **Tessa Boudrie** - Hope and Homes for Children
23. **Nolan Quigley** - Hope and Homes for Children
24. **Mark Riley** - Hope and Homes for Children
25. **Dr. Kiran Modi** - Udayan Care
26. **Leena Prasad** - Udayan Care
27. **Lopa Bhattacharjee** - Family for Every Child
28. **William Gali** - Family for Every Child
29. **Andrea Nave** - Forget Me Not
30. **Anju Pun** - Forget Me Not
31. **Suruchi Poon** - Forget Me Not
32. **Aisling Ledwith** - Lumos
33. **Vuthaya Charoenpol** - SOS Children's Villages International (Asia Office)
34. **Rebecca Smith** - Save the Children



## KEY ISSUES AT A GLANCE



### BANGLADESH

Lack of trained psychosocial counsellors, lack of knowledge at supporting children. More awareness of child rights needed.

### BHUTAN

Challenge of geography, scattered settlements, accessibility to services for some communities. Children institutionalised as a last resort.



### LAOS

Plan of action for social welfare workforce has been submitted to the government.

### MALDIVES

Family reintegration is a priority There is a need for ongoing monitoring of children reintegrated into society eg need for psychosocial support.



### NEPAL

Importance of widows and supporting them, reminder that only 58% children have registration documents.

### PAKISTAN

Need for asian action plan for LGBT+children and notably children with neutral gender at birth . Need to move away from perception that this issue is just about institutions.



### SRI LANKA

Over 58% of children are in children homes for over 3 years.

### THAILAND

Example of private and public foster care. Foster care should be last resort as they do still have their own family in some cases. Government has a plan - questions remain about resourcing. We suggest importance to govt minimum core standards linked to CRC eg on right to be heard.





# SESSION ONE

## Opening Session



### Session Speakers

- **Tessa Boudrie**, Chair of the BICON organising committee
- **Dr. Rinchen Chopel**, SAIEVAC/CRC
- **Dr. Kiran Modi**, Udayan Care / BICON Founder

### Session Overview

Introduction to Dr. Chopel. Welcoming all distinguished participants. Introductory remarks. Setting the expectations, the role of human rights and child rights commissioners in transforming alternative care in Asia. About BICON and our vision. A formal welcome from the BICON organising committee.

#### Tessa Boudrie

Welcome on behalf of the organising committee of BICON.

#### Dr. Rinchen Chopel

The DGD and BICON have reframed the way we talk about alternative care, placing it firmly as a human rights issue. The high profile given to the topic by these two events presents us with a huge opportunity to ground their interventions and recommendations at national level across Asia.

This round table was conceived as a dynamic way to progress this conversation. By looking at what action is happening or planned in different countries we can start to translate the recommendations from the DGD as well as BICON and build momentum. By starting this conversation we can identify a way forward that builds more substantive policy interventions at the national level.

#### Dr. Kiran Modi

A heartfelt welcome to all of the participants. First some background about BICON. Back in 2014, Udayan Care conceived the idea of biennial conferences on alternative care. From an Indian and then South Asian starting point, over time these have grown to cover all of Asia. In 2021, the fourth BICON co-organised by eight agencies took place online. We are grateful to Dr. Chopel for his involvement over the years.

A key ingredient in all BICONS has been the involvement of care experienced young people. With the latest BICON care leavers were involved in the organising committee and we have been moving towards a genuinely co-created event.

As we meet today, the situation has never been more urgent. The entire care system in Asia has buckled under the pressure of the pandemic. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on poverty which has led to an increased risk of child-parent separation. Comprehensive investment and fresh thinking is needed.

We need to deepen the conversations that started in the DGD and continued at BICON. Today's roundtable was conceptualised as a way to keep that momentum going. It brings together national human rights commissions and child rights commissions from several countries in Asia. We hope that these conversations will lead to strengthened national legislation and policies by initiating dialogue with policy makers and influencers on promoting family friendly policies and family-based care models and expanding social protection services. We also hope that roundtables can help to bridge the gap between the voices of children and care leavers and policy makers and practitioners. We hope that this is the first of many such events.

# SESSION TWO

## Presentation on Children's Rights Rights of Children in Alternative Care



### Session Speakers

- **Ms. Mikiko Otani**, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- **Lopa Bhattacharjee**, Family for Every Child
- **Karishma Singh**, Care Leavers Association and Network (CLAN), India

### Session Overview

Setting the scene, the perspective of the CRC on the rights of children in alternative care. Our vision for implementing the recommendations of DGD in Asia. Organising committee members sharing key recommendations of BICON. Representative of the care experienced reference group.

#### Ms. Mikiko Otani

My thanks to the organisers for the invitation to share the perspective of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

As someone with a background in family law, I have direct experience of the interaction between a child and the care system. As a witness of the challenges and day to day realities for children in alternative care, it is a topic to which I am committed.

Alternative care is a very important area of child rights - and it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted the risks and the need to maintain momentum.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child comprises eighteen members with three from Asia. We review country reports of all areas of children's rights and make recommendations. It is important to follow these recommendations. We also conduct thematic discussions and make recommendations (for example the DGD) which should act as guidance to States of the need to act. There is a need to make sure recommendations from the United Nations Treaty Bodies are being implemented. Events like this are so important to take forward those conversations moving them from a global level to regional and national level.

To guide our conversations today, I would like to share some principles:

- Sometimes families need extra support to care for children.
- It is important to recognise and address the root causes that push children into alternative care. These might include poverty, parents working abroad, difficulties in the home, disability, emergencies etc.
- If separation happens in the best interest of the child, the children should be given care in family settings as much as possible, not institutions.
- Children in alternative care are vulnerable to violence.
- State should support family reunification.
- Child participation is important and young care leavers are important stakeholders. Children should have recourse to justice.
- Institutionalisation should stop, children should be in a family setting.



I would like them [adults] to know that each child is special and has their own ability.

They [children] should be respected and treated the way each human wants to be treated.

They should be supported physically and emotionally as well as be heard.

My wish is to have equal opportunities and to have access to all the projects, proposals and financial aid that other young people have who, like me, are about to turn 18 and do not have disabilities.

For some of us alternative care was where we were abused, not at home with our families.

You need to have the right people - this isn't just a 'job'; this affects our lives and future.

At what age does care stop? Being prepared to live alone, without any support from your family, isn't just about being able to cook and clean. We need to be physically, mentally and emotionally prepared for living independently.

The more that people understand what we are going through and the more they are able to listen to us and make us part of our plan, the better they can support us. We need staff who we can talk to.

We come from poor families that have suffered exclusion. Living in institutions does not improve our life conditions nor that of our families. Sometimes it makes it worse.

### Lopa Bhattacharjee

Recommendations from BICON 2021, informed by: BICON 2021, 2021 United Nations Day of General Discussions on Alternative Care and Children's Rights, and the voices of children and young people who participated in the UN DGD 2021.

#### 1.1 Support families to fulfil their caregiving responsibilities

- Governments should adopt comprehensive family-oriented policies and expand access to universal and social protection services.
- Develop and scale up family and community-based services that respond to root causes of separation.
- Ensure access to inclusive services at the community level, for all children.
- Increase investment into early childhood development.

#### 1.2 End stigmatisation and discrimination against children with disabilities

- Governments should tackle structural discrimination against children with disabilities.
- Ensure policies protect the full scope of rights of children with disabilities.
- Governments should identify children with disabilities.
- Increase investment in community sensitisation efforts.

#### 2.1 Guarantee suitable high-quality care for every child in need of alternative care

- Governments should ensure all alternative care services meet and comply with international laws and standards, and domestic laws and policies.
- Mandate registration and accreditation for all private alternative care service providers and regulations enforced.
- Prohibit the use of unskilled volunteers in residential care facilities.
- Prioritise family-based care and ensuring that family-based care services are available and accessible.
- Strengthen gatekeeping to ensure alternative care is only resorted to when necessary.

#### 2.2 Comprehensive individualised support provided to all young people when transitioning out of care

- Governments should adopt laws and policies that guarantee care leavers access to comprehensive, well-coordinated, multidisciplinary aftercare support.
- Aftercare services should be developed collaboratively and delivered through public-private sector partnerships.
- Ensure access to all personal documents.
- Designing and developing of all aftercare services to be informed by listening to children and young people.
- Prioritise the development and support of care leaver networks.
- Recognise the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on care leavers.

#### 3.3 Eradicate the use of institutional care for all children

- Governments should commit to ending the detention and institutionalisation of all children.
- Governments should adopt moratoriums for the establishment of new institutions.
- Prioritise efforts to deliver high-quality reintegration services.
- Develop mechanisms to enhance multisectoral collaboration.
- Strengthen the social workforce's capacity to support reintegration.
- Collaboration among governments, civil society organisations, and private alternative care service providers.

***"I have always had a desire to change the system."***

### **Karishma Singh**

Thank you Dr. Chopel, and Greetings to all the dear delegates. Let me begin by sharing a story with all of you. I remember reaching out to one of my sisters for understanding how COVID-19 has impacted her and how she is in general? She began by sharing how difficult it is for her to feed herself and her child. She chose marriage as a source of security. She got separated from her husband years ago. She requested If I could help her place her child in the CCI only so that he can have food and education. She mentioned, it is too difficult for her to continue with her life. At the end of the call.

**She said: You know I wish there was someone to hold my hand strongly growing up. To guide me. To support my education so that I could also lead a better life. Have a better job. There is absolutely no one I can rely on. Where shall I go? What wrong did I do to be here?**

This is not just her situation. There are many stories which are beyond our imagination. I am Karishma Singh and I am a young person with lived experience of being in formal care in India. I speak here on behalf of all children and care leavers from Asia and I hope I am able to do justice to our cause. Having spoken at the last BICON in Dec 2021. I am thankful that I have been given a chance again to speak to senior delegates and representatives of governmental bodies from different countries in Asia.

**I have always had a deep desire to change the care system to improve the situation of my sisters and brothers in care.**

As an active member of a care leavers network in India and also one of the founding members of the global care leavers community I consider myself fortunate that I get enough opportunities to share with key stakeholders what I hear from my peers. As a member of the reference group that co-created the 4th BICON, I am thankful to my other group members, Dikshya, Manoj and Nimali for all their support and inputs provided.

Care leavers across countries have similar experiences and challenges. This is perhaps because the way we care for children in care is largely the same or similar in most places. It is very clear now that children must remain with their families and that is the best place to grow and thrive. The 4th BICON has clearly given us evidence of this. The 4th BICON has also made it clear that those who make decisions and policies for children and youth must listen to us more often. It is our lives and we must be given a chance to say what we want to make out of it. The BICON and the DGD outcomes are making this clear all over again. So, to all the delegates at today's round table I request you to please put systems and mechanisms in place in your countries where children and care leavers are heard and taken seriously.

Most of the care leavers I have met have faced challenges in their education, lack life skills, vocational training. This has often limited their dreams and aspirations. For all the future children in care in Asian countries I plead upon the government representatives to focus on ensuring quality education for children in care. Countries must encourage universities to provide scholarships and freeships for care leavers. The right environment that allows them to pursue their studies is very important so that we can become what we want to.

Care leavers must be supported in overcoming their real life challenges. Mostly we are pulled back because of the pressure to thrive and earn for our living from an early age. Also, we must not ignore the fact that COVID-19 has worsened the situation of children and care leavers more.

Care leavers must have a system like a one stop solution for all their problems. There must be one widely known go to person or agency we can approach for guidance.

**Keep us in the center of all you do for us. This is what we all have to tell loud and clear to all of you.**

Every child is unique and so is their need. Every child deserves the very best care with or without family. So much is at stake. The situation of children and care leavers is grave. We must not delay. Right care at the right time is extremely important.

Before I end, I must make a few requests. To all of you who are part of this BICON in different ways please commit yourselves to mentor and guide one child without parental care. This can be the most contributing service you can do for us. To all the care leavers I must ask - come together and let's make our own heart family - we will drive the care conversation and change it. To the governments in Asia I appeal that in anything that you do for us keep us in mind and include us in the policy and decisions that you make for us. Don't forget us. Include us in the support services we need in areas of housing, education, skilling and employment. Another appeal to all the governments of Asia is to give each care leaver a unique identity card that allows us to access and avail support services easily and with dignity. We are a resource and want to be contributing citizens of our countries and the region.

**I will end by quoting one of my sisters from across the continent: Don't decide for us - include us and support us. We will make it possible for the world.**

I am thankful to the organizing committee of the 4th BICON for having included us in their planning and to all of you for hearing me out on behalf of the care leavers.



## SESSION THREE

### Recommendations and Discussion from the DGD and BICON Common Prioritised Areas

#### Session Overview

The recommendations and discussions were guided by the following questions:

1. What are the priority areas of children's rights and child care in your country?
2. Does your country have a care reform strategy or plans to develop one?
3. What do you see as your country's main challenges in care reform? And how can these be addressed?
4. What can be done to further facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices across the region?
5. How are you intending to take this discussion forward in your respective government and ministry?
6. How can BICON help? And how can you help BICON and the care experienced reference group?



#### BANGLADESH

**Rabiul Islam**, Deputy Director and Member Secretary of the Child Rights Committee of the National Human Rights Commission

The Commission is an independent body and was started in 2009. Child rights issue is one of the most important topics and the child rights committees in Bangladesh are testament to that. The priority issues of the Commission include child labour (especially which worsened during the pandemic). The Government took good initiatives but did not reach its goals. Other priorities include child marriage, corporal punishment, domestic violence and reproductive health. In terms of child care, positive parenting is a priority as parents do not consider that children have rights especially for participation. Early childhood care and development is also a priority, along with priorities on alternative care standards and sensitisation of parents and community.

#### Challenges:

- The government and NGOs have established centres but they are not child friendly.
- Lack of trained psychosocial counsellors, lack of knowledge for supporting children.
- Lack of national coordination structures and information about services being provided by NGOs.
- Need for changing people's perception and attitude.
- Child participation is important but this is largely ignored in Bangladesh.
- Need to improve sensitisation of the public to child rights generally.
- The Children's Act has minimum standards of care, and describes the need for certification. But this is not duly followed.

#### Way forward:

- People need to be aware of child rights and parents need to be sensitised.
- Appropriate budget allocation.
- More training support.
- The Child's Act needs to be followed especially Sections 63 and 64 that encourages minimum standards and having certified institutions.

The Commission hopes to learn how other countries are tackling this topic and expressed interest in exchanging best practices and experiences.

## BHUTAN



**Ugyen Tshomo**, Acting Director General of National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)  
**Yeshey Lham**, Chief of the Children's Division of NCWC

It was noted that many of the recommendations from the DGD and BICON are already in the pipeline for Bhutan. The highest priority is ensuring holistic care and education for children. Holistic refers to the wellbeing and happiness of children upholding the provision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In collaboration with the Government, civil society, private sector, development partners and other stakeholders the Commission aims to ensure the well being of the children. A few areas of focus highlighted were:

1. The Government takes a preventive approach towards ensuring that every child is protected from violence, abuse and exploitation.
2. The Government is committed to achieving universal primary education. This ranges from quality, efficient, inclusive education from early childhood care to pre-primary up to standard 12.
3. Every child must survive, and has an inherent right to life. The Government ensures the highest standard of health for prevention of illness and rehabilitation and adequate physical, spiritual, cognitive and social development of the child.
4. To facilitate participation of children spaces provided for involvement in society particularly in decision making and concerns that affect them.

The Commission highlighted that there is a ten-year road map to assist quality care and education based on the mapping and assessment that was done. Action plan for child protection was developed in 2012 and has been revised in line with the current 12 year strategy. This is an ongoing process and a new child policy is being drafted. Enactment of Child Care and Protection Act 2011; Child Adoption Act of 2012 and Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 2013 are in place and mechanism in place.

### Challenges:

- Because of the geographical context there are accessibility challenges and it can be difficult to provide free education for children in such places.
- Human resource and capacity is a challenge in developing and delivering the reform and providing prompt services to communities. The new National Child Policy and Plan of Action of 2021 will soon be in place and this will include the setting up of child-friendly spaces in the capital and in the districts.
- The Commission continues to advocate for children not staying in institutions but with families and close relatives. Institutions are seen as a last resort.



## LAO PDR

**Khamsouk Somphavong**, Deputy Director, Division of Child Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Victims, Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare  
**Pisay Souavansay**, UNICEF

With support from UNICEF, the Government is focusing on improved quality services in all communities, with child protection centres and improving the capacity of service providers and para social workers.

It has an action plan to strengthen the social workforce that has been submitted to the Government for endorsement and implementation. The National University of Laos is assessing the BA curriculum with the aim to strengthen its BA social work course. The Government is in the process of developing alternative care guidelines for service providers and professionals supporting parental care.

### Challenges:

- Major challenge is funding; Human resources (including at the university) and more opportunities for capacity building.

Additional information from Deputy Director: Draft recommendation to strengthen social protection will be discussed in the Ministry soon.



## MALDIVES

**Aminath Rishmee Amir**, Director General from Child and Family Protection Service  
**Fathimath Barra Ibrahim**, Assistant Director Advocacy and Awareness from Child and Family Protection Service  
**Samaau A Najeeb**, Member of Human Rights Commission

From the Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Rights (Aminath Rishmee Amir and Fathimath Barra Ibrahim). The Commission focuses on providing children with 'community integrated shelter homes' with smaller numbers of children. This allows them to work closely with families and help with reintegration with families. In 2019 Maldives ratified the Child Rights and Protection Act under which alternative care is taken care of. In 2005 institutional care mechanisms were developed. In 2016 another institution was established. More focused approach in State care that allows to work with families and reintegrated children.

### Challenges:

- The Child Rights Protection Act is a beautiful piece of legislation regarding alternative care, but in practice there is a need for more attention to implementation. For example, the need for a comprehensive initial assessment of children before placement in facilities. If that is not done right, that can also impact other children.
- There is a need for ongoing monitoring of children reintegrated into society, for example to assess the need for psychosocial support.

## NEPAL

**Lily Thapa**, Member of National Human Rights Commission



The UN General Assembly adopted June 23rd as Widows Day. In Nepal there are 285 million widows. 75% of these are below poverty. It is challenging for single mothers to care for their children in this patriarchal community. This impacts children's care. A strong recommendation on this point related to the rights of these children and the need to support these mothers is needed. Children need to be at the centre of all decision making and planning. Every child is special no matter what their parents are.

In Nepal, data shows 50% have birth certificates, which is contrary to the CRC committee. Lack of awareness is the major problem, why children are left out. Lack of awareness of parents.

During the pandemic, many girls experienced abuse and reported while still more numbers were unreported (1,393 girls reported in 2019-20).

15% of children in the age group of 5-17 are in child labour as per CSO data. They are working in the informal sector in hazardous situations with no education and no nutritious food.





## PAKISTAN

**Professor Farkhanda Aurangzeb**, Senior Consultant Human Rights Education from National Commission for Human Rights

While looking at all the children, children born with neutral gender is not considered. Transgender is common in South Asia. They have to be taken care of. Most miserable life is led by these children who need to be included for special intervention and their participation. A plan of action at Asia level is needed.

**Iqbal Ahmed Detho**, Member of National Commission on the Rights of Child

The Federal Government has constituted the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) in exercise of powers conferred by Section 3(1) of the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017 (XXXII of 2017) under a notification issued on February 28, 2020. NCRC has a broader mandate of protection and promotion of child rights in Pakistan. In order to deliver on such an important mandate, the Commission is empowered to examine and review any law or policy or practice for protection of child rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation. Many children in Pakistan are at risk of various forms and types of abuse, including child labour, corporal punishment, child sexual abuse, harmful traditions, etc. Child labour in domestic work is a common form of child labour and child abuse in Pakistan. Considering the potential for child exploitation and abuse that domestic work entails, NCRC, in fulfillment of its mandate under Section 15(a) (b)(c) of the NCRC Act, has analysed the problem of child domestic labour and prepared a policy brief on the existing legal framework in Pakistan to identify gaps and recommend remedial measures to address the issue.



## SRI LANKA

**Lakmal Ponnampuruma**, Clinical Psychologist, National Child Protection Authority

Priorities of Sri Lankan are engaging in law reforms and NCPA is the monitoring body.

NCPA also monitors child development centres. to 2020 visit 349 children's homes both private and government exists and 8,0057 children are living outside their families and residing in [shelter] homes for more than 3 years. Currently NCPA has submitted a concept note with proposals for foster care.

Currently the law is finalized and reviewed by the government. Two foster care strategies are proposed. Child is with the parent. If the parents are not fit, then only child is removed and placed with other parents. Identified parents are often fit to have the child but have financial problem.

## THAILAND

**Prachumporn Chaiyarat**, Human Rights Officer from the National Human Rights Commission



Although Thailand has comprehensive legislation including the ones to protect children there have been challenges in monitoring child rights. In terms of these challenges, two examples were shared, one was related to children who were sent back to their families where domestic violence is persistent. Second case was about private foster care that exists, either supported by international agencies or the CSOs. The preference is given first to look for family and community and then to other options. The Government attempts to ensure private foster homes are safe for children, the national standards and regulations of foster care were developed, and firstly implemented within the facilities of the Government. Through this implementation, the Government aims to scale and support private foster homes to be aligned with the international standards. This is also to demonstrate the Government's efforts to decrease the number of care institutions, including the Government ones. Currently, the Government is working with key NGOs to strengthen and enhance efficiency of foster care and kinship care.

# SESSION FOUR

## Closing Session



### Session Speakers

- **Ms. Mikiko Otani**, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- **Tessa Boudrie**, Chair of the BICON organising committee
- **Dr. Rinchen Chopel**, SAIEVAC/CRC

#### Ms. Mikiko Otani

Ms. Otani expressed her impression by the examples shared by the different countries. It was a welcome to hear that some of the issues identified by the DGD are already on the agenda of different countries. However it is clear that more time was needed to discuss these points.

The roundtable was an innovative pilot discussion. She suggested (and expressed her support) that the BICON organisers follow up with the participants to facilitate further conversations. It would be good to hear more about the common challenges, what topics that needed more discussions and what assistance could come from the international level to facilitate these regional and national conversations in Asia.

Ms. Otani also highlighted the role of the Global Association of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and the example of the European Network of Children's Commissioners and Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) as an example. She emphasised that the Commissions had a special role along with their government line ministries and that should be raised.

#### Tessa Boudrie

Today's conversations have been broad and deep. I would like to thank the participants for their open-hearted approach to the discussions and willingness to share. We have only just started to discuss the implications of care reform and a human rights based approach to alternative care for children in Asia - but this was a good stepping stone and BICON stands ready to continue to facilitate these conversations.

Different countries are at different stages of the care reform process and are operating in different contexts. It has however been striking to see some strong commonalities coming through.

We heard that the impact of the pandemic on children and the resilience of their families should not be underestimated. This has exposed children to harm and

put significant pressure on families and communities, and also on those who support them.

We heard about the essential role of social workers and the need to build their capacity to be able to support children and families. Psychosocial support was identified as a key ingredient of successful reintegration when children are returned home from alternative care

We heard about the existence of many laws and action plans but a need for a more concerted focus on their implementation. We also heard about the need to do more to raise awareness of child rights and the harm of institutionalisation.

As well as these common messages, we heard calls for more focus to be given to the rights, needs and vulnerabilities of LGBT+ children, widows and single mothers.

Karishma shared a strong message of the need for active involvement and input of care experienced young people in this process. At BICON this is at the heart of what we do and we would urge participants to reflect further on this point.

On behalf of the BICON organising committee, I thank you all for your participation and look forward to the next opportunity. Please share with us how we can support you.

#### Dr. Rinchen Chopel

In his final remarks Dr. Chopel mentioned that it is obvious that more time is needed to hear about all the exciting things happening related to this subject and once the countries have absorbed the reports from DGD and BICON there is a need to see how these can be consolidated in a more effective way.

His message to the BICON organisers: "I am happy to facilitate, to link with different countries directly and build on the discussions."