

# 'Need quality and compulsory education for all under 18'

2 girls from India back from UN meet after making a presentation on the condition of schools and children in rural India

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FOR children of Virpur village in Jamnagar district of Gujarat, going to school means covering 20 km on foot. With no proper transport and lack of resources, the landless labourers of the village are forced to stop sending their children to school. This, according to Af-sana Noyada, 16, is "a viola-

tion of child rights". She, along with Manjula Munavalli, 17, from Dharwad district of Karnataka, made a presentation on the condition of schools in rural India before the United Nations Committee on Child Rights that met in Geneva on October 10.

Noyada, who stays in a hostel in Jamnagar city, is the first from her village to have studied till Class 12. Speak-

ing at the conference on issues ranging from dropping out of school to child labour, Noyada's main focus was on the urgent need to re-define the term, 'child'. "Quality and compulsory education should be made available to all under the age of 18. If my siblings had an access to compulsory education, they would not have been forced to quit at the primary level itself," said Noyada.

The presentation was based on an exercise that was carried out over five years. Like Noyada, several children had participated and prepared a report on the condition of children across the country. This report was an alternative to the report submitted by the government to the UN. The report — researched and compiled by children — was finalised at national workshops organ-

ised by several NGOs in January 2012 and May 2013. The final report was sent to the UN in July 2013.

In the 34-page report, the children have compiled several interviews of children who find it difficult to access schools, outlook of the states towards education, discrimination faced by girls and Dalit and tribal kids in school, lack of teachers and infrastructure, among other issues.

"This was an important discourse. India has ratified UN convention on child rights and hence has to report periodically about the progress on implementation of the convention. Along with the government's report, it was necessary to provide their (children) perspective, too," said Arokia Mary from NGO Yuva, who had accompanied the girls to Geneva.

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