

# PRIMARY & SECONDARY

## GENERAL ISSUES

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YEAR 2023

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### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### STREET CHILDREN – ESTIMATED NUMBER

(16/05/2023)

(No. B/525) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to street children, she will state the –

- (a) current estimated number thereof, indicating the number –
  - (i) of boys and girls;
  - (ii) out of school, and
  - (iii) using drugs;
- (b) number of staff members of her Ministry attending thereto, and (c) measures envisaged to address this situation.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, to contextualise my reply, allow me to attempt to quote UNICEF regarding the term ‘street children’. Mr Speaker, Sir, the term ‘street children’ has different interpretation worldwide and I am informed that the UNICEF has attempted to categorise ‘street children’ as follows –

“Street-living children are those under the age of 18 years old who spend most of their time on the streets. These are children who cut ties with their families and live alone on the streets”.

In Mauritius, there is no legal definition of ‘street children’, Mr Speaker, Sir. Consequently, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am, therefore, informed that, so far, no case of street children has been reported at the level of my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that there are 60 Family Welfare and Protection Officers, 17 Enforcement Officers and 16 Psychologists on the establishment of my Ministry to cater for children and families in distress.

As regard part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, measures to address adverse conditions faced by street children, if reported, are as follows but not limited to –

- (i) Provision of Psycho-Social support to the victims;
- (ii) Identification of the parents and provision of rehabilitative services;
- (iii) Referral of parents to the Ministry of Social Integration and Social Security for financial support, as deem appropriate;
- (iv) Referral to the National Social Inclusion Fund (NSIF), for additional logistics support and arrangement for alternative placement of children, whether be it in family or in a residential care institution, where parents or next of kin are not available, and there is also the
- (v) Networking with SAFIRE to ensure that children faring in street conditions are provided with all the support as appropriate.

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** En 2015, dans son rapport, le Comité des droits de l'enfant des Nations Unies avait exprimé son inquiétude par rapport aux milliers d'enfants en situation de rue dont l'existence même n'était pas suffisamment reconnue. Ce comité avait recommandé de mettre sur pied une stratégie ...

**Mr Speaker:** No! Hon. Member, you are not making a debate about whatever committee. This is a supplementary question. Put your supplementary question! Nobody else has the floor!

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Ce comité avait recommandé - je cite juste la recommandation de ce comité - de mettre sur pied une stratégie pour adresser le problème et dans son dernier rapport, cette année-ci ...

**Mr Speaker:** No, no, again! Put the question!

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Ce comité a fait exactement les mêmes ...

**Mr Speaker:** No! I am going to disallow. I give you a last chance! I give you a last chance! Either you can put a question or you can't put a question. (*Interruptions*) Nobody has the floor!

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** *I am asking the question now.* Est-ce-que l'honorable ministre peut désormais donner la garantie puisque ce comité dans son dernier rapport en 2023 a fait les mêmes recommandations huit années plus tard qu'elle va mettre sur pied une table ronde avec les ONG et toutes les parties prenantes afin de finaliser une stratégie comme recommandé par le Comité des droits de l'enfant des Nations Unies ?

**Mr Speaker:** This is a better question!

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I appreciate the supplementary question from the hon. Member from the other side but once again, allow me to reaffirm and inform the House that the term 'street children' itself is very ambiguous and is subject to several interpretations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

To begin with a strategic plan is of course to bring a legal definition to the term 'street children'. To try to put it in a context, street children in Mauritius could be referred to what so many of us including myself has done as children in our childhood which is during the school holidays, spent the entire day on the streets and then when it starts getting dark, go back home. So, to answer the question of the hon. Member of the Opposition, the very definition of 'street children' has to be established, first and foremost. And yes, should the need be, it will be in the right direction and going towards implementing the recommendation of the UNCRC which we are doing anyway.

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Est-ce-que l'honorable ministre peut donc nous dire quand elle a l'intention d'emmener ce *legal definition* qu'elle a mentionné parce que c'est un grave problème, des milliers d'enfants sont en situation de rue ?

**Mr Speaker:** Very good question!

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Very simple and short answer: soon!

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! Hon. Hurreeram, I think you are going to reply to this question.