

STATEMENT
NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR THE
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION
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Fundamental Right to Education**

STATEMENT

The National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education is a direct consequence of attempts to generate a campaign to support the 83rd amendment to make education a fundamental right. Pratham initiated the idea of a National Alliance and invited a few major NGOs and funding agencies to create such an Alliance. These founding partners* formed the Alliance on May 23, 1998, on the eve of the May 24-25 National Conference on Fundamental Right to Education in New Delhi.

The National Alliance is NOT a registered body and unlikely to be so for some time to come. It is envisaged as a fclt-need-driven platform created by many organizations. Participating organizations may have diverse opinions about various details of different issues but will be united on the minimum basis of a broad understanding that even child has a fundamental right to education and that it must be realized with a great deal of urgency. In this regard, Article 45 of the Constitution of India and the Supreme Court Judgment in the case of Unnikrishnan vs the state of Andhra Pradesh will define the minimum basis of unity until further advancement of the Constitutional or legal status of the matter.

What are the points of agreement?

The first meeting of the Alliance outlined some broad points of commonality.

- Education is a fundamental right of every child. Children must be in school, not-at work.
- The right to education of every Indian child should be realized by year 2005. This is possible.
- Quality and equitability of education must improve all across India.
- Government cannot successfully implement the right to education on its own. People's participation is essential. Mechanisms have to be developed at the school and in administration through models, statutes, and mutual cooperation to encourage effective participation of people.
- In spite of differing views on various specific issues, anyone participating in the Alliance must actively work to make sure that ALL children are in school and learning.
- Factors impeding universalisation of elementary education are more social, political, and cultural in nature. Improvement of pedagogical techniques and their wide, effective dissemination is essential to make school learning effective. This is also a way to involve more teachers, parents and to overcome the impediments.
- Replicable large-scale work is important.
- All sections of the civil society have to work together. Empowerment of teachers and parents are key issues.
- In order to ensure that ALL children are in school, it is essential to counter gender bias at all stages and levels.
- The Alliance will not work in a manner that may undermine, nationally or internationally, the gains of the last fifty years and the long history of social reform and struggle for self-reliance.

What will the Alliance do?

The Alliance will work in a multi-pronged manner. It will:

- act as a platform to voice various opinions about specific issues so that more and more people who are normally away from such debates learn about them and participate in creating a broader consensus.
- work with all levels of government, the Parliament, the people, the media and industry/business to make fundamental right to education and related matters a national priority.
- monitor the status of education while also encouraging, creating, and catalyzing large-scale replicable models of realization of the fundamental right.
- work to gather and disseminate factual information about education, not only to opinion-makers and policy-makers but also to the parents of children whose future is at stake.

Who can participate in the Alliance?

At this time, any organization or individual who can contribute to the work of the Alliance will become a part of the Alliance at the recommendation of one of the founding partners.

The Alliance is no exclusive club. Nor is it a closed-door organization. A group of a few organizations meeting occasionally cannot hope to make an impact on the status of education nationally. We must make an impact. Large numbers of organizations working in some harmony across the country for the realization of the fundamental right to education are essential for the formation of a true National Alliance. The few major organizations who have joined together to form the Alliance will work to make it grow.

Who will decide policies and action plans? How?

The Alliance is not a static entity. As it evolves and grows, the methods of running the organization will also evolve. Decision-making processes have to suit the form of organization and the goals/ activity of the organization. The small number of founding partners have met in Delhi twice and have taken a few decisions by mutual consultation. As our state and district-level activities grow, State Chapters and a National Coordinating Group will be formed. The decision-making process will go on changing. If it does not, there will be no Alliance! Hence, we will have to make a beginning and allow the best-suited decision-making process to evolve for each state and at the national level.

One clear restriction will be that no one will make policy statements on behalf of the Alliance unless a due process is followed. Also, no action anywhere can be called an Alliance action unless it is approved through due process. The meaning of "due process" will change continuously until the Alliance has reached a sizable strength in terms of numbers, geographic coverage, and commitment of partners.

Any decision-making process, which leads to narrowing the scope for participation by large numbers of people, or which causes inaction, or causes undue delays in action, cannot be justified in the context of the National Alliance.

What action is planned at this time? Can it be changed? Modified?

1. Campaign to meet every MP across the country in her/his constituency in order to inform them and to gauge their response. In order to make this campaign a success, we will have to contact and induct at least one group in every Lok Sabha constituency to join the Alliance action. The campaign is not only an advocacy action, but also an exercise in building an organization through this action.

2. Work in about 1000 villages and a few cities to create models of realizing the children's right to education through activation of people. This exercise will help us to exchange experiences in different parts of the country. It will also help us to evolve, learn, and document replicable solutions to universal and specific problems.

In the first action, a common discipline and time-schedule will have to be followed so that we come across as an Alliance. In the latter plan, each individual or organization will have the opportunity to try different models and philosophies to ensure realization of the right to education of every child in the given group of villages. There is sufficient scope to try out different models and ideas in the 1000 village plan.

What about financing activities of the Alliance?

The founding partners have decided that, at least for the time being, there will be no central pool of funds. As and when activities are decided upon, the Funding agencies in the Alliance will have bilateral or multilateral understanding with the grassroots organizations concerned about meeting financial needs.

In the final analysis...

Ultimately, the survival and success of the National Alliance will depend upon how much we can trust one other, whether we can make a better impact together than we can individually, whether we activate people in large numbers or we get entangled in debates.