



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-first session

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Akshar Foundation, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## Recommendations on Education Reform to Secure Children's Environmental Rights

Akshar Foundation (ECOSOC Special Consultative Status) (1) is an internationally-renowned education NGO based in Assam, India. Akshar Foundation was lauded by United Nations, World Economic Forum, awarded by the Earth Day Network, and amplified by media outlets including BBC, the Guardian, Aljazeera, TIME, Reuters, Forbes and more, for our innovative policy of "Plastic Schools Fees", as well as other pedagogical innovations aimed at the elimination of child labour and child poverty. Akshar works to upgrade schools into centers for sustainable development. Thus, schools become centers for children to learn about – and work towards achieving – the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In so doing, the Akshar NEP 2020 model has proved highly effective in promoting recycling, tree-planting, and clean energy use in schools, environmental education and achieving 100% compliance with household plastic recycling segregation at source.

The Akshar NEP 2020 Education Model upgrades free government-run schools into centers for sustainable development, by combining conventional academics with practical vocational training and community development projects (food distribution, tree-planting, plastic collection and recycling, animal welfare, etc.). To eliminate child manual labour and dropout, older students are "employed" by the school to tutor younger ones, and participate in other initiatives, like tree-planting, plastic recycling, care of stray animals, maintenance and installation of solar panels, and more. Sustainability efforts become a part of the curriculum, so students get an excellent, practical education, while improving their own communities.

Akshar believes children can be part of the solution, that they can participate meaningfully in creating a healthier environment for themselves. Parents at Akshar schools are required to pay "Plastic School Fees", a weekly submission of all of their clean, dry household plastic to the school Recycling Center. Previously, most parents burned their plastic waste, often within breathing distance of their children. During winters, the plastic fires were used as bonfires for warmth, causing further injury to the children's lungs and eyes. After instituting the "Plastic School Fees" policy, with penalties for violators including loss of benefits like free uniforms and free bus service, now, 100% of the parents send their plastic for upcycling at school, where students create new products from the plastic. Parents have been educated on the harmful effects of burning plastic on children's health and the environment, and they have signed pledges to never again burn plastic.

All students are also required to participate in solar panel installation, as well as participation in regular tree-planting activities. Students with a propensity for afforestation will be trained to join the Government of India's effort to bring a third of the land under forest cover, which has already increased by 5.2% between 2001 and 2019 (2). If similar measures are scaled to all schools, we can empower children to create a significant impact on their own environment, resulting in cleaner and healthier communities for themselves.

Akshar is currently partnering with the Government of India as well as UNEP (3) to scale up this model in 100 government-run schools, consistent with the Government of India's National Education Policy, which requires the incorporation of environmental education and remediation into schools. We will consolidate our plastic remediation efforts in these schools with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), a national campaign of the Government of India. In government-run schools which Akshar has partnered with, "Plastic School Fees" will be known as "Swachh Bharat Requirement", to answer the call of the Government of India and teach all children about their responsibility for creating a clean and healthy nation. Akshar will also install 100 solar power plants in government schools, and train students in their installation and maintenance. Students with a propensity for technical skills will be guided into careers as solar technicians, to become part of India's successful green energy initiative, which has met its COP21 target of 40% of power capacity sourced from non-fossil fuels 9 years ahead of schedule (4).

Akshar strongly recommends OHCHR promote activities like those described above, as well as using the policies of the Government of India as a model for other member states, to create a new generation of environmentally conscious citizens, with experience in hands-on ecological remediation before they even graduate.

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1. <https://www.aksharfoundation.org>
  2. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/forest-restoration-india-ambitious-climate-goals/>
  3. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/can-plastic-bottle-be-ticket-education-india-yes>
  4. <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/india-s-clean-energy-transition-is-rapidly-underway-benefiting-the-entire-world>