STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Innovative Approaches in Safeguarding and Promoting Child Rights

TWO-DAY INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP | 17–18 NOVEMBER 2026 | GOLD CREST HOTEL, MAURITIUS

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OOC), Mauritius, brought together International Ombudsman Institutions, child-rights practitioners, academics, public officials and young people for a two-day international workshop dedicated to strengthening the protection and promotion of children's rights. Held under the theme "Strengthening the Role of Ombudsman: Innovative Approaches in Safeguarding and Promoting Child Rights", the workshop provided a platform for reflection, shared learning and practical cooperation across institutions and borders.

DAY 1 | BUILDING A SHARED FOUNDATION

The opening ceremony featured a welcome address by Hon. Aneeta Ghoorah, Ombudsperson for Children, Mauritius, followed by addresses from Hon. George Robert, IOI President for the Africa Region and Ombudsman of Seychelles; Hon. Ayesha Hamid, IOI First Vice-President and Ombudsman Punjab; and H.E. Dharam Gokhool, G.C.S.K., President of the Republic of Mauritius. The speakers unanimously emphasised that children's rights, needs and priorities must remain at the forefront of the national agenda, stressing that meaningful progress and development cannot be achieved unless the fundamental rights of every child are adequately protected and fulfilled. The President of the Republic also highlighted the importance of conducting impact assessments of Ombuds Institutions to evaluate their effectiveness, measure their contributions and strengthen their role in promoting accountability and safeguarding citizens' rights.

The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Satyajit Boolell, SC, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission. His presentation examined the Venice Principles, the Paris Principles and the United Nations Resolution on Human Rights Defenders, highlighting their importance in ensuring the independence, effectiveness and credibility of oversight institutions. He emphasised that Ombuds Institutions must rise above bureaucratic barriers and bring their services closer to the people, particularly those living in remote areas. He further underscored the importance of accessibility, proactive outreach and institutional resilience in ensuring that no one is left behind.

The morning plenary had as moderator, Hon. Niumaath Shafeeg, Children's Ombudsperson of Maldives. The plenary session explored international and regional child-rights instruments and mechanisms, notably the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, presented by Mr. Amar Mahadew, lecturer at the University of Mauritius, as well as emerging and contemporary challenges affecting children's rights, addressed by Mrs Karabo Ozah, Director of the Centre for Child Law, University of Pretoria. Together, these discussions connected the legal framework with the realities facing children and those mandated to protect them.

The afternoon plenary session had as moderator, Mrs. Beaulah Mguni, Deputy Ombudsman of Botswana and it featured two insightful presentations. The first presentation, entitled "The Role of Ombudsmen and Mediators in Responding to Emerging and Contemporary Challenges," was delivered by the Hon. Bernard Achitz, Secretary General of the IOI. The second presentation, entitled

“Beyond Stigma: Protecting Children Confronting HIV,” was delivered by the Hon. Dr Mohammad Sohail Rajput, Ombudsman of Sindh. Both presentations highlighted the evolving responsibilities of Ombudsman institutions in addressing emerging societal challenges, promoting inclusive approaches and ensuring that vulnerable groups, particularly children in detention centres and migrating children in Austria and children with HIV in Sindh province of Pakistan were protected from discrimination and exclusion The afternoon programme also included group discussions and presentations on various thematic areas, providing participants with an opportunity to exchange experiences, reflect on common challenges faced by Ombuds Institutions and share practical approaches to strengthening their institutional roles.

A dedicated session on Good Practices also provided a valuable platform for showcasing innovative initiatives and sharing institutional experiences from different Ombuds Institutions. The presentations featured “Endogenous Mediation in Benin,” delivered by the Hon. Conrad Gbaguidi, Mediator of Benin and President of the Association of Ombudsman of UEMOA; “Punjab’s Mobile Van Outreach Programme,” presented by Mr. Shahid Abbas, Compliance Officer, Office of the Ombudsman Punjab; and Mauritius’ experience in promoting child participation through the Jeunes Ambassadeurs des Droits des Enfants (JADE), presented by Ms. Liyana Dedaur and Ms. Sanya Oozeerally. All these exchanges reinforced the understanding that Ombuds institutions should reach out more and more to children. Also, effective child protection requires strong institutional partnerships, trusted relationships, community engagement, accessible mechanisms and meaningful participation by children and young people.

DAY 2 | INNOVATION, PRACTICE & COLLABORATION

The second day, held under the theme *"Innovation, Practice & Collaboration"*, focused on how Ombuds Institutions could adapt their approaches, strengthen their impact and respond more effectively to emerging and evolving risks. Perspectives shared by Hon. Ayesha Hamid, Ombudsman Punjab and Vice President of IOI and Ms. Usang Maria Assim, Associate Professor of Law at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa explored the importance of innovation from institutional and academic viewpoints respectively. Hon. Ayesha Hamid expressed her commitment to advocating for the establishment of an Office of the Ombudsperson for Children in Punjab, recognising the importance of having a strong voice dedicated to safeguarding children's rights. Ms. Usang Maria Assim, in turn, highlighted that millions of children risk losing the foundations essential to their development because of an excessive focus on the future. She stressed the need to keep human beings, particularly children, at the centre of all development initiatives, reminding participants that progress must never come at the expense of children's fundamental needs and well-being.

The plenary session *"Beyond Complaints"* had as moderator, Mrs. Shivani Georgjevic, lecturer in Law at the University of Mauritius. The session featured several presentations covering key aspects of child rights protection and administrative justice. Ms. Shaseed Mungur, Senior Law Reform Officer at the Law Reform Commission of Mauritius, addressed 'the role of whistleblowers in alerting Ombuds Institutions to violations of children's rights. Hon. Aneeta Ghoorah, Ombudsperson for Children, Mauritius, highlighted 'the power of persuasion, advocacy and impact in advancing children's rights'. Hon. George Robert, Ombudsman of Seychelles and IOI President for the Africa Region, shared perspectives on 'constitutional coherence and administrative justice: The Seychelles Experience'. Finally, Mrs Niumaath Shafeeg, Children's Ombudsperson of Maldives, explored the concept of 'beyond complaints', emphasising the importance of proactive engagement and broader institutional interventions.

The programme also explored the practical contribution of technology and professional partnerships in strengthening the work of Ombuds Institutions. Presentations on ARPACOM, delivered by Mr. Jean Yves Perrine, Technical Director and Fractional CTO of ARPACOM, and presentation on the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), presented by Mr. Melvin Yogolingum, Board Member of the ACFE, invited participants to reflect on how technical expertise, information systems and appropriate technological tools could enhance institutional efficiency, investigations and accountability.

During the afternoon programme, participants engaged in discussions and collaborative work towards the development of a **Resolution on Strengthening Ombudsman Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights**. The adoption of the Resolution provided an important opportunity to consolidate the ideas, recommendations and commitments emerging from the two-day workshop.

Towards the end of the workshop, participants also welcomed valuable comments and reflections from the Jeunes Ambassadeurs des Droits des Enfants (JADE), ensuring that the voices of young people were heard. A civil society perspective was also shared by Mrs. Melanie Vigier de la Tour-Berenger, representing NGO Konnecte, Mauritius, highlighting the importance of parental education and collaboration between Ombuds Institutions and civil society organisations in advancing children's rights.

In his closing remarks, Hon. Bernard Achitz, Secretary General of the IOI, acknowledged the common challenges and difficulties shared by participating Ombuds Institutions. He expressed his appreciation for the support and solidarity demonstrated among the different institutions and highlighted the IOI's willingness to support initiatives in the advancement of human rights. He further underscored the value of continued cooperation, mutual support and the exchange of experiences in strengthening Ombuds Institutions and enhancing their capacity to protect and promote children's rights.

In pictures:









