



**Keynote Address**

by

**Dr. P. K. Mishra**

Principal Secretary to Prime Minister

at the

**Inaugural Session of the National Conference**

on

**Ensuring Everyday Essentials**

**Public Services and Dignity for All**

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**Keynote Address of**  
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Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, Justice V Ramasubramanian; Members of the Commission; Chairperson of State Human Rights Commission; Representatives of National Commissions; Colleagues from the Government of India; UN officials and diplomats; members of civil society and academia; and distinguished guests,

I am delighted to join you today as we commemorate the World Human Rights Day – a day of profound significance for democratic nations such as ours, where constitutional ideals, democratic institutions and societal values work together to protect and promote human dignity.

Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948 says:

*“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”*



Human Rights Day is not simply a commemoration of a historic declaration. It is an invitation to reflect deeply on the lived experience of human dignity. This year's theme, 'Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials' places the spotlight where it matters most – on **public services**, on **institutions** and on the **systems** through which citizens interface with the State.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 gave the world a shared vocabulary of dignity. India contributed significantly to this process. Our delegation led by Dr Hansa Mehta ensured that the Declaration stated that all **human beings** are born free and equal. This was a decisive step for **gender equality** and helped guide global thinking on human rights. The notion that rights must be realised through access to food, water, shelter, education and justice remains at the core of the human rights movement.

Human rights thinking has since evolved. What began with civil and political rights expanded to include **social, economic and cultural rights**. It is now taking shape in new areas influenced by technology, digital systems, environmental concerns and changing **forms of vulnerability**.

Today, dignity is shaped not only by the freedoms we have long recognised, but also by access to privacy, mobility, clean environment and digital inclusion. The world **continues to refine** what it means for every person to live a life of dignity.

India's civilisational ethos has long placed dignity and duty at the centre of public life. Concepts such as **dharma, nyaya, karuna and seva**, emphasised righteous conduct, and a commitment to the welfare of others. **Ahimsa** guided restraint, **vasudhaiva kutumbakam** encouraged a sense of belonging to a larger human family.

These principles influenced a great deal in framing our Constitution, from **universal adult franchise** and enforceable fundamental rights to the **directive principles** that prioritised education, health, livelihood and social welfare, because our directive principles reflect a



very fundamental aspect of human rights and human dignity. In this context, I would like to say a few words about our approach to human rights; our approach to human development in the recent years.

In the decade prior to 2014, India focused on a **rights-based approach** to development. Legislations such as Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 and the National Food Security Act 2013, sought to transform basic **developmental needs** into **legal rights**: the **right to education**, the **right to work** and the **right to food**.

However, as we look back, several academic assessments underlined an anomaly or deficiency in this rights-based approach: enacting a right is one thing, implementing it is another. When promised legal rights are not delivered in practice, it can adversely affect the **credibility of the State** and deepen citizen's frustration. After 2014, the government placed primary emphasis on what is known as a '**saturation approach**' and '**effective delivery**'. The idea was to reach every eligible person and close the long-standing gap between law, policy and actual delivery. The focus was on actual delivery, how the rights or benefits arising from the rights actually reach the last mile and the last person.

**Saturation implies** that “not a single eligible beneficiary should be left out.” It also means that the scope of discretion is eliminated and social justice enhanced.

The Prime Minister feels that we must identify the beneficiaries or the people who are eligible to get the benefits and try to cover all of them in different villages and areas. In other words, there should not be any discrimination. There should not be any targeting. Every individual who is eligible must get the benefit. Of course, there is a system of delivery, which I will briefly mention later.





Academic and policy literature increasingly characterises this shift as moving from '**paper rights**' to '**implemented rights**' (rights which are actually implemented) – from a phase where many guarantees existed in law but did not consistently reach the last mile; to a phase where administrative systems, digital infrastructure and field campaigns are designed to ensure that **entitlements reach every eligible person**. The three things I mentioned, the administrative system has to be more attuned to the people, more empathetic and more efficient. The digital infrastructure also helped and field campaigns, awareness generation and so on.

The **saturation approach** does not abandon the rights-based framework; rather it **grounds it in implementation**.

The legal and ethical commitment to education, food security, work, health and housing remains, but it is now pursued through:

- Time-bound targets for full coverage,
- Real-time monitoring and digital platforms,
- Nation-wide outreach campaigns such as the **Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra**, explicitly aimed at identifying and enrolling every remaining beneficiary.

Today, the focus is on ensuring that a **bank account** is actually opened, a **water tap connection** is actually provided, an **LPG cylinder** is actually delivered and a **health card** is actually usable at the point of care. What I am trying to say is that it is not merely stipulating a particular right but seeing that it is actually delivered.

The success of this approach can be seen on the ground and is backed by hard data. Poverty is a critical element that deprives individuals of their human rights. Therefore, **poverty alleviation** is the most effective human rights intervention

India has registered a **historic decline** in the **multidimensional poverty** index. About 25 crore Indians – a population larger than many countries – have come out of the clutches of poverty during the last decade.

Our latest Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys have also brought out similar results. In fact, Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys 2022-23 and 2023-24 reveal a similar decline in the level of poverty and people below poverty line. This shows the effectiveness of the delivery system and focused approach.

## **Realising Everyday Essentials: A Decade of Transformation**

I would like to say a few words about what sort of transformation that has taken place during the last decade.

I will highlight **four** key **pillars** through which everyday essentials - and therefore everyday human rights - have been progressively secured for crores of Indians over the last decade.

**A. Ensuring Dignity at Home by provision of Housing, Water, Sanitation, Electricity and Clean Fuel**

- **PM Awas Yojana** enabled about four crore families to own pucca houses, giving them not just shelter but a sense of security and pride. 4 crore houses actually built and lived by people.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission** has provided tap water connections to over 12.50 crore households.
- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** achieved wide - ranging sanitation access, such as construction of over 12 crore toilets and cleanliness – profoundly impacting health, dignity and safety, particularly for women and girl children.
- The **Saubhagya** scheme resulted in the electrification of unelectrified houses.
- **Ujjwala Yojana** transformed the lives of women by providing clean cooking fuel to about 10 crore households.

**B. Ensuring Social Protection through Food Security and Health Assurance**

- It is well known that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** provided free food grains to over 80 crore people.
- Through **Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY**, the world's largest health assurance programme, offering coverage to about 42 crore people, providing assurance when



there is an ailment, requiring indoor medical facility. The amount is paid through an assurance scheme to the people who are really needy.

- Health and Wellness Centres, telemedicine systems and **Jan Aushadhi** outlets have also helped in providing medical services and medicines.
- Implementation of schemes which provide **insurance** and **pension** coverage for informal sector workers. The newly enacted **labour laws** provide for social benefits to **gig workers**, which were earlier outside any social protection
- Reforms such as the **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** have also helped.
- **International organisations**, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), have acknowledged that India's **social protection coverage** has **expanded** widely in the last decade. ILO noted that our social protection coverage rose from just 19 per cent in 2015 to **64 per cent** in 2025.

### C. Ensuring inclusive economic growth through Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment

- The **JAM Trinity** - Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile - has revolutionised **direct benefit transfers**, ensuring **transparency**, **efficiency** and **dignity** in public service. Over 56 crore Jan Dhan accounts have brought the unbanked into formal finance. The money / benefit goes directly into their account so that leakage is minimal.
- Schemes such as **PM Mudra Yojana**, **PM SVANidhi**, **PM Vishwakarma** are to help people who are masons, who work with their own tools. The idea is how to not only give them some financial assistance but also improve their skills, give them better implements, better training.







- Large number of **Self-Help Groups** have been encouraged – there are over two crore “**Lakhpati Didis**” in the sense that women who work on their own, have become lakhpati or they earn more than a lakh rupee.
- A central pillar of our development journey has been women's empowerment. Measures such as **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** and **Naari Shakti**. Our Prime Minister has repeatedly emphasised that “**Naari Shakti** is the biggest strength of our nation.” When women lead, families rise, communities change and institutions become more **empathetic**. A historic legislation was brought recently that one-third of the seats in the legislatures and Parliament will be reserved for women.
- There has been massive increase in the infrastructure budget. The capital budget has been enhanced substantially, and a lot of reforms have taken place even during the COVID-19 when many countries focused more on stimulus. Here our Prime Minister talked about reforms. FDI expanded, the space sector was opened. Consequently, we have high growth rates. The latest quarterly result showed 8 per cent, preceded by 7.2 per cent growth.

#### **D. Ensuring Justice, Safety and Protection of Vulnerable Communities**

- The **Criminal Law Codes** have been transformed to make them more citizen friendly.
- There have been stronger provisions in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act**, 2016 and so on.
- **PM-JANMAN** focuses on marginalised within the marginalised in the sense that some tribal areas where people – the particularly vulnerable groups are facing developmental issues – how to provide them housing, clean water and other benefits.



- **Aspirational Districts and Aspirational Blocks Programme** – with focus on districts and blocks which are less developed – aimed for clear improvements in health, education, nutrition, infrastructure and public service delivery to bring them to the level of other districts by using real-time data, **outcome based monitoring** and **collaborative administration**. These efforts show how **governance** can be **redesigned** to make outcomes more equal. This is the spirit of **antyodaya** which places those at the margins at the centre of development and dignity. There has been a lot of efforts and focused attention to bring the blocks and districts which are below the average state – level parameters to the overall average level of the state, thereby improving the economic and social conditions and dignity of people who are much behind in the development journey.
- Our **humanitarian assistance** – from providing COVID-19 vaccines to more than 100 countries under Vaccine Maitri, to disaster relief across regions – demonstrates our belief in the universality of human rights.
- Driven by the Prime Minister's call for **Jan Bhagidari**, nature of public service delivery has changed. The State is moving from **prescribing to responding**, from **delivering schemes to delivering dignity** and from viewing people as **beneficiaries** to seeing them as **partners** in nation-building.
- India's recent election to the UN Human Rights Council (**UNHRC**) reflects **global confidence** in our democratic institutions and commitment to inclusive development.



I have argued that Rights are important, a rights-based approach is necessary, but it is not sufficient. What is important is how to ensure last-mile delivery, how to ensure that all those who are eligible are actually covered. That is the most important thing and that is what was achieved during last decade.

## Moving Forward

As India moves toward Viksit Bharat 2047, the National Human Rights Commission will need to examine emerging issues of concern and adapt its frameworks so that dignity is protected in domains that are evolving quickly:

- **Climate and environment** raise urgent questions. Climate change is already causing displacement and greater pressure on shared resources. We must consider how the rights of communities are affected by climate change and how environmental justice will be ensured for those who bear disproportionate pollution burdens.
- **Technology and data** bring their own challenges. Issues of data protection, algorithmic fairness and responsible AI require a new framework to address issues of human rights. When automated systems influence decisions on loans, jobs, or criminal justice, safeguards are essential to prevent discrimination.
- **New forms of work** such as gig and platform employment create vulnerabilities that do not fit traditional labour protections. With no fixed workplace and algorithm-driven



tasks, employers need to develop frameworks that protect their dignity and security.

- Finally, **digital surveillance** is another area that needs oversight. As digital tracking, facial recognition and predictive tools generate and store extensive data on citizens, we must ensure that technology serves empowerment and does not erode personal freedoms.

## Concluding Observations

We need to recognise that **good governance** is an **essential right**. It includes **efficient** systems, **transparent** processes and institutions that treat people with **respect** and **empathy**. It includes **grievance redressal** that functions effectively, **policing** that protects dignity and **public service delivery** without delay and disrespect.

Our aspiration for the coming decades is clear. We are striving for a developed nation where every citizen enjoys dignity through **capable institutions** and **compassionate governance**.

A nation modern in its capabilities, grounded in enduring values, inclusive in its outlook and united in purpose. This vision extends to liveable cities and vibrant villages where **mobility, sanitation, digital connectivity, public transport, safe public spaces** and efficient **urban services** uphold dignity in everyday life.

The way forward lies in deepening **citizen-centred governance**, using **technology** responsibly, **strengthening** institutional foresight and ensuring that dignity remains the guiding principle of every public service.

Let us build a country whose **values** are rooted in our civilisation, but vision is **modern, futuristic, compassionate and aspirational**.

Let us join hands and work together – government, institutions, civil society and citizens – to build an India where **development and justice** go hand in hand, where **rights and duties** reinforce one another and where every individual can live with dignity.

I thank the Chairperson NHRC, Members and the Secretary General for providing me with an opportunity to interact with all of you on this momentous occasion.

I wish today's conference all success. Thank you.

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समानी प्रपा सह वोन्नभागः।  
समाने योक्ते सह वो युनज्मि।  
अराः नाभिमिवाभितः॥


- अथर्ववेद-संज्ञान सूक्तम्


“All human beings are born free, their dignity and rights are equal, they have been given intelligence and conscience by God and they should behave with each other in a brotherly manner. Just as the strings of the wheels of a chariot connect the wheel to the axle, in the same way all should help each other harmoniously.”




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