

**Address of**  
**Hon'ble Former President of India,**  
**Shri Ram Nath Kovind**  
on  
**Foundation Day**  
of  
**National Human Rights Commission, India**  
on  
12<sup>th</sup>October, 2023 at New Delhi

- Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, **Justice Shri Arun Mishra**;
- Esteemed Members of the Commission, **Dr. D. M. Mulay and Shri Rajiv Jain**;
- Secretary General, NHRC **Shri Bharat Lal**;
- Chairpersons and members of the statutory bodies;
- Former Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts;
- Chairpersons and members of the State Human Rights Commissions;
- Officers of the Central & State Governments
- Members of the legal fraternity, civil society and Human Rights Defenders;
- Distinguished invitees, Ladies and Gentlemen!

1. I am delighted to be here to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India. On this remarkable journey of three decades, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Chairperson, members and officials of the Commission and to whole Human Rights fraternity. Your tireless efforts in championing the rights of under-privileged and vulnerable sections of society over these 30 years are a testament to your commitment to the cause of human rights. Since its establishment on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1993, the Commission has consistently striven to ensure the protection of civil and political rights as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. No doubt, National Human Rights Commission has created a niche for itself, more importantly in the hearts of people, who need this institution most.

2. The concept of human rights is not new to India. It can be traced back to ancient Indian texts like the Smritis, Upanishads, Puranas, Vedas, Dharmasastras, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Guru Granth Sahib, and many more. Buddhism and Jainism are based on the concept of empathy and compassion – the core values of human rights. Fundamental to these teachings is the belief that every individual is born free and equal, possessing reason and conscience.

Rigveda, for instance, transcends the concept of equality defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by emphasizing unity in all our endeavours.

3. One of its verses, I quote:

“समानीव आकृतिः समाना हृदयानि वः।  
समान मस्तुवो मनोयथा वः सुसहासति॥

*This means that no one is superior or inferior; all are brothers; all should strive for the interest of all and progress collectively.*

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

4. In 1947, Dr. Julian Huxley, the then Director General of UNESCO, had written a letter to 60 stalwarts and had asked for their guidance. He had asked in the letter as to what would be the basis for the World Charter of Human Rights. Among the great personalities of the world, he sought opinion from; our Father of Nation Mahatma Gandhi was one of them. Gandhiji said that we can earn the rights of our lives only when we fully perform our duties as citizens. That is, in a way, the rights can be protected by performing duties themselves. This has rightly been stated in the Indian constitution.

5. Without introducing rights, it was not possible to make masses realize the importance of equality and justice. But to protect these rights, we must be obliged to perform our duties.

6. In the subsequent year, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was unveiled, aiming to secure equality, dignity, and peaceful coexistence. India played an actively involved role in formulation of the UDHR, with leaders such as Smt. Hansa J. Mehta making visionary and invaluable contributions to the drafting process. Her efforts transformed the document from being solely about men to encompassing all human beings.

7. Presently, India is a signatory to all major international human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, among others. We have always been committed to working in unison with international communities.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

8. There is no higher calling for a society than the social empowerment of its most marginalized sector by ensuring human rights to them. This noble aspiration

has now become a reality through the government's unwavering commitment, going the extra mile to ensure that the vulnerable are genuinely empowered. The government didn't just rely on administrative measures; it chose the path of legislation, to uplift those on the fringes. This legislative pursuit reflects a collective agreement, among the nation's most eminent lawmakers, underlining the government's unyielding determination to elevate the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. The Indian government is committed to the idea of 'Leaving No One Behind.' This means making sure that everyone, especially vulnerable groups like women, children, and persons with disabilities (PwDs), is included and taken care of.

9. In 2016, the government passed 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill'. In recognizing not just seven but twenty-one disabilities; it displayed a vision of inclusivity that mirrors the dynamism of our times.

10. Similarly, to ensure greater protection to SCs/ STs, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was further strengthened.

11. Adopting a rights-based statutory framework, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 was enacted to protect the rights of people with mental health issues.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

12. As you all are aware, for years, justice remained an elusive dream for Muslim women due to the practice of Triple Talaq. The government extended a voice to the voiceless by banning this very act forever.

13. In India, the constitutional right to access to clean drinking water can be drawn from the right to food, the right to clean environment and the right to health, all of which have been protected under the broad heading of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

14. In this direction, India has taken steps to ensure dignity and improve the quality of life for every citizen. The most significant gesture of dignity is the provision of sanitation facilities, particularly toilets. With the initiation of the Swachh Bharat Mission in India, access to clean and hygienic toilets has become a tangible reality. To date, over 10 crore toilets have been constructed, bestowing dignity upon millions of households especially women and girls.

15. To combat vehicular emission, Bharat stage-VI standards have been introduced for vehicles. Similarly, to ensure clean drinking water, the Jal Jeevan Mission was launched. As of today, 13 crore tap water connections under Har Ghar Jal are quenching the thirst of million households. To restore the health of the rivers and those dependent on it, the rejuvenation of rivers has been undertaken across the country. Today, the efforts made under Namami Gange have led to the revival and rejuvenation of Ganga Maa.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

16. A hope for a healthy life from the hopelessness of diseases is not a distant dream now. With Ayushman Bharat yojana, the world's largest health insurance initiative, about 25 crore families are now able to avail healthcare services. Earlier, high out-of-pocket expenditure, low insurance and increasing costs of secondary and tertiary healthcare forced people to sell their land and other valuable assets to meet the healthcare expenditure. India has also shown commitment towards the right to health not only for its citizens but also on a global scale. This was evident when India sent Covid-19 vaccines, medical equipments and medicines to over 150 countries during the covid-19 pandemic.

17. Women had to earlier bear the brunt of smoke and with the introduction of Ujjwala yojana, they have now been freed from this drudgery. Today, more than 9 crore gas connections have been given in the names of women. They are also given 33% reservation in the legislature to voice their opinion, contribute and participate in building a better future.

18. Having a shelter over one's head is a right of every individual. The government has provided over four crore all-weather houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

19. Food is an essential human right for survival. Some parts of India follow the concept of Langar, or community kitchen reflecting values of selfless service and equality. Similarly, during the lockdown, the government ensured that the poor did not remain deprived of food. For this, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was launched, and since 2020, food grains are being distributed free to over 80 crore people. In addition to this, there are several other schemes such as mid-day meal, Antyodaya Anna Yojana to ensure that no one goes hungry.

20. Recently, the government introduced the Vishwakarma Yojana, a tribute to those with traditional skills, the artisans, the craftsmen, the creators who toil with their hands and tools. This initiative underscores the government's relentless march toward greater sensitivity to human rights.

21. In each of these steps, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to the ideals of human rights, transforming laws and lives, and shaping a more inclusive and just society.

## **Ladies and gentlemen**

22. NHRC has been an embodiment of India's concern for the promotion and protection of human rights of every individual. The Commission has made significant contributions, in mainstreaming a human rights-centered approach in policy and programmes as well as generating awareness about human rights and sensitization among public authorities and civil societies.

23. It has been a consistent endeavour of the Commission to safeguard the human rights of individuals, and communities in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution of India. The Commission has over the years made significant contributions in the advancement of the right to life, liberty and dignity of individuals.

24. I am told that The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has over time, developed a robust set of monitoring mechanisms to oversee civil and political rights as well as matters concerning socio-economic justice. The Commission has also developed a unique mechanism along the lines of the instruments and special procedures adopted by the United Nations for human rights protection, monitoring the safeguards through public institutions.

25. For the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, the Commission has taken a number of initiatives on the issues of right to health, education, rights of women, children, persons with disabilities and displaced persons, among others. Simultaneously, the Commission has endeavoured to promote human rights culture in the country.

26. I have been told that the National Human Rights Commission has issued several advisories from time to time. Recently, the Commission released 02 human rights advisories for 'Welfare of Transgender Person's' and 'Advisory on Mental Health' to the Union and State Governments. The Commission also takes *suo moto* cognizance of matters of utmost attention.

27. In India, the judiciary also plays a critical role in enforcing fundamental rights. By enacting Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution, the Courts have substantially expanded the scope of judicial review and developed modern strategies and techniques by allowing the impoverished and disenfranchised to access justice through Public Interest Litigation (PIL).

28. This year, we have witnessed significant achievements in various domains. Recently, India has further extended its presence and impact on the world stage during its G-20 Presidency. India facilitated discussions and initiatives aimed, at addressing climate-related challenges, promoting renewable energy sources, and enhancing environmental sustainability, all in the interest of human rights. India's leadership in advancing the global climate agenda has strengthened our position as a responsible and forward-thinking nation committed to a greener and more sustainable future for all. Our effort to get the African Union included in the G20 as a full member shows that we believe and act on the principle of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' i.e. – the whole world is one family.

29. As we all know acts of terrorism and violence are against the basic principles of human rights. Similarly, during wars, people especially soldiers, women and children lose their human rights. It gives me immense pride to state that India has consistently upheld human rights and believes in peace by never

initiating any war. It condemns violence and terrorism, in all forms and manifestations. This commitment is a testament to our cultural values of empathy and compassion, especially towards those in need, underscoring our dedication to the principles of human rights.

30. As we look back at last 30 years and peer ahead into the future, let us remember that the journey of human rights is an ongoing one. I urge NHRC to continue to work towards a society where the inherent dignity and worth of every individual are not just words, but a living reality.

31. I hope that in harmony with our cherished values and rich cultural heritage, we will continue to champion the cause of human rights and disseminate the message of one earth, one family. Once again, I congratulate all of you on the occasion of the Foundation Day of Human Rights and believe that everyone will work in partnership to protect and promote the human rights of every human being.

**Thank You,**

**Jai Hind!**

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