



F.No. R-17/17/2022-PRPP (RU-2)
National Human Rights Commission

Minutes of Core Group Meeting on 'Human Rights Defenders'

A meeting of the Core Group on Human Rights Defenders & NGOs was held on 19th July 2024 at the Manav Adhikar Bhawan, New Delhi. The meeting was chaired by Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC. Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law), Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary and other senior officers were present in the meeting. Representatives from various ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academia along with members of the Core Group and special invitees also attended the meeting. The list of participants is annexed.

2.) The Agenda of the meeting of the Core Group was 'Identifying the roles, responsibilities, and Challenges of Human Rights Defenders in India' which broadly focused on four critical themes, i.) Roles and responsibilities of Human Rights Defenders ii.) Organizations/Institutions as Human Rights Defenders in different areas of Human Rights; iii.) Need for creating awareness and Interface between citizens and Human Rights Defenders; and iv.) Challenges and Way Forward. Each of the themes was elaborately discussed in four technical sessions.

3.) **Mr. Devendra Kumar Nim** commenced the meeting with a warm welcome extended to all participants. He expressed gratitude for everyone's presence and emphasized the significance of the gathering in discussing the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in India. He acknowledged the crucial role played by HRDs in uncovering human rights violations and advocating for marginalized groups and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reaffirmed its commitment to protecting and promoting human rights across the country. He further highlighted the Commission's mandate and mechanisms aimed at supporting NGOs and institutions working in the field of human rights. Later, he discussed the agenda for the meeting focused on

identifying the specific roles and responsibilities of HRDs, recognizing organizations and institutions as HRDs in various human rights domains, raising awareness about HRDs, fostering interaction between citizens and HRDs, and addressing challenges faced by HRDs with a forward-looking approach.



[NHRC officials and Core Group Members during the meeting](#)

4.) **Smt. S. Vijay Bharati, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson** commenced the meeting with a warm welcome extended to all attendees, emphasizing their shared commitment to nation-building. She introduced the theme of the meeting, focusing on the timeless Indian traditions of *daana* (giving) and *seva* (service), which are integral to our cultural heritage. The discussion centred around the profound application of these traditions in the context of human rights advocacy across India. It was highlighted that human rights defenders embody the spirit of *daana* and *seva* through their dedicated efforts to uphold the dignity and rights of others. They were acknowledged as courageous individuals who often risk personal safety to serve marginalized communities and speak out against injustice. The meeting underscored the indispensable role of human rights defenders in democratic governance, emphasizing their efforts in ensuring accountability, advocating for justice, and promoting sustainable development. Participants recognized them as essential pillars of societal progress, particularly at the grassroots level, where they facilitate access to government policies and programs.



Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC delivering the Inaugural Address to the participants of the Meeting

5.) **Dr. Mandakini Amte** from Lok Biradari Prakalp discussed three fundamental responsibilities of human rights defenders: creating awareness, implementing policies effectively, and facilitating rehabilitation and capacity building within marginalized communities

6.) **Dr. Shamin Modi** emphasized the critical role of training for police officers. She highlighted that training could enhance awareness of human rights laws and improve interactions with the public, emphasizing empathy and procedural justice. Dr. Modi proposed establishing a grievance redressal authority chaired by a retired district judge to address issues like false accusations against human rights defenders and bureaucratic hurdles.

7.) **Ms. Monali P. Dhakate** discussed the ministry's initiatives aimed at benefiting marginalized communities, including the Transgender Act and skill development programs for SC/ST/OBC communities. She emphasized the need for better coordination among ministries and called for sensitizing police forces to ensure effective enforcement of human rights.

8.) **Dr. Jitendra Singh Shunty** recommended enhancing transparency & outreach of the work and discussion made in the core group meetings and proposed issuing identification cards for human rights defenders. He highlighted concerns about terrorism and suggested forming NHRC committees to visit affected areas, pacify populations, and prevent radicalization.

9.) **Mr. Subash Chakma** stressed the importance of filling vacancies within NHRC to enhance its operational efficiency. He advocated for NHRC officers to visit Manipur to listen to grievances directly from affected individuals and suggested providing financial support to grassroots human rights organizations.

10.) **Mr. Sandeep Chachra** emphasized the necessity of protective policies for human rights defenders. He suggested that NHRC organize workshops at the district level, conduct town hall meetings, and involve civil society organizations to enhance direct interaction with defenders. Chachra proposed establishing an award to recognize the contributions of human rights defenders and recommended including representatives from vulnerable communities in NHRC fact-finding teams.

11.) **Ms. Naseema Khatoon** shared insights into the challenges faced by sex workers and their children underscoring the need for nuanced approaches to address their rights and livelihood issues. She highlighted the misconceptions surrounding sex work and stressed the need for comprehensive discussions beyond trafficking narratives. Ms Khatoon praised the success of the Police Pathshala initiative in Bihar, where police educate and build trust with children of sex workers, contributing to community cohesion and empowerment.

12.) **Ms. Enakshy Ganguly** emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment for human rights defenders. She urged NHRC to protect defenders during critical times, particularly in cases of forced evictions which constitute severe human rights violations. Ms. Ganguly called for proactive intervention by NHRC in addressing these issues.

13.) **Ms. Pushpa Girimaji, Senior Journalist and Consumer Rights Activist** highlighted emerging challenges such as AI exploitation and urged NHRC to educate the public about their rights comprehensively. She emphasized the need for legislation on issues like active euthanasia and same-sex marriages, underscoring NHRC's role in advocating for these reforms.

14.) **Mr. Shah Aamir** emphasized NHRC's role in prioritizing cases of clear human rights violations and suggested enhancing sensitivity training for enforcement authorities, particularly police personnel.

15.) **Mr. Ajay Bhatnagar** discussed the pivotal role of police officials and administrative personnel in implementing and safeguarding human rights. He emphasized the need for checks and balances in the field to ensure the protection and promotion of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). Mr Bhatnagar underscored

that both the NHRC and HRDs are aligned in their pursuit of a common goal and emphasized the importance of working together with sincerity and dedication to achieve a meaningful impact

List of Participants

NHRC officials/ staff

1. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson
2. Mr. Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Inv.)
3. Mr. Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law)
4. Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary
5. Mr. Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary
6. Lt. Col. Virender Singh, Director
7. Dr. (Ms.) Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research)
8. Ms. Swarna Singh, Junior Research Consultant
9. Ms. Madhura Naniwadekar, Junior Research Consultant
10. Ms. Prerna Hasija, Junior Research Consultant
11. Ms. Aakanksha Sharma, Junior Research Consultant
12. Ms. Saptarni Majumdar, Junior Research Consultant
13. Mr. Raghendra Singh, Junior Research Consultant
14. Ms. Vintee Sangwan, Research Assistant

Core Group Members/ Ministries / Special Invitees:

1. Ms. Monali P. Dhakate, Joint Secretary, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, MoSJE, GoI
2. Dr. Shamim Modi, Professor and Chairperson, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
3. Dr. Mandankini Amte, Lok Biradari Prakalp
4. Dr. Jitendra Singh Shunty, President, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Sewa Dal
5. Mr. Suhas Chakma Director, Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG)
6. Mr. Sandeep Chachra, Executive Director, Action Aid Association
7. Ms. Naseema Khatoon, Founder, Parcham
8. Ms. Pushpa Girimaji, Consumer Rights Activist and Senior Journalist
9. Ms. Enakshi Ganguly, Executive Director, Housing and Land Rights Network
10. Mr. Shah Aamir, Advocate