

Address for Chairperson for the Commission's Foundation Day function on

12th October 2017 at DRDO Bhawan, New Delhi

Esteemed Chief Guest this evening – Chief Justice of India, Justice Shri Dipak Misra ji, my esteemed colleagues and Members of the Commission – Justice P C Ghose, Justice D. Murugesan, Shri S C Sinha, and Smt Jyotika Kalra, Secretary General, NHRC, former Chairpersons and Members of the NHRC, Chairpersons and Secretaries of National Commissions and State Human Rights Commissions, Special Rapporteurs, Members of the Core Groups and Members of the Editorial Board of the NHRC, senior officers of various Ministries of the Government of India, Vice-chancellors of various Universities, Heads and representatives of UN agencies and other international organisations, Members from the Media, NGOs and civil society, artistes from the Song and Drama Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Officers and Staff of the National Human Rights Commission, winners of the Commission's Hindi Essay competition, painting competition and other awardees, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the National Human Rights Commission, I extend a warm welcome to all of you to the Commission's Foundation Day celebrations. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our special appreciation and warm welcome to the Chief Justice of India, Justice Shri Dipak Misra ji, to this Function.

Justice Misra has had a long and illustrious career in the Indian judiciary, spanning nearly four decades. He was enrolled as an Advocate in 1977 and has practiced in Constitutional, Civil, Criminal, Revenue, Service and Sales Tax matters in the Orissa High Court and the Service Tribunal. He was appointed as an Additional Judge of the Orissa High Court in 1996 and subsequently transferred to the Madhya Pradesh High Court. Justice Misra had been Chief Justice, Patna High Court and then, the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, before being elevated as a Judge in the Supreme Court in 2011. He is the current and 45th Chief Justice of India. We extend you a very warm welcome, Justice Misra ji, to this Foundation Day Function.

Today, the National Human Rights Commission has completed 24 years of its pioneering work in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Foundation Day is an important milestone for us – to not only acknowledge our achievements so far, but also to self-reflect and renew our resolve to work with even greater vigour in the future.

Since its establishment on 12 October 1993, the Commission has worked continuously towards bringing a human rights-centered approach in the Government at Central as well as State level. It has also taken several initiatives towards creating human rights awareness and sensitization among public authorities and civil society. Through the years, the Commission has consistently worked to broaden the ambit of human rights to ensure the protection of the civil

and political rights of the people as well as safeguard their economic, social, and cultural rights.

The Commission has also evolved guidelines and a rigorous reporting system concerning custodial deaths and rapes, deaths in alleged fake encounters as well as living conditions in prisons, with special attention to aspects of overcrowding, medical care for prisoners and the sensitization of prison staff to the rights of inmates. During the previous year, the Commission continued to monitor these important human rights issues.

The NHRC has been organising programmes for government officials, field functionaries, and representatives of NGOs, Universities etc. to encourage them to make a human rights-based approach central to their work and activities. During 2016-17 (up to 31.03.2017), 109 NHRC sponsored training programmes on Human Rights and related issues were conducted by 90 institutions. Delegations of 622 students as well as trainees and officers from various universities and institutions visited the NHRC and were briefed on human rights issues.

The Commission also continues to organise its coveted month-long Summer and Winter Internship Programmes for University students from across the country, in addition to providing an opportunity to large numbers of students for short-term internships with the NHRC. 99 such students successfully completed their Summer and Winter Internship programmes during 2016, besides, 105 students who had the opportunity for short-term internship with NHRC.

There has been a phenomenal increase in the number of complaints received by the Commission over the years – from 496 complaints in 1993-94, the Commission registered 91,887 (Ninety One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty Seven) cases during 2016-17. The Commission has disposed off 1,00,622 (One Lakh Six Hundred and Twenty Two) cases, which include cases carried forward from previous years.

During the said period, the Commission also recommended payment of monetary relief amounting to Rupees 11,32,77,500 (Eleven Crore Thirty Two Lakh Seventy Seven Thousand and Five Hundred) in 533 cases. The phenomenal increase in the number of complaints is indicative of the growing awareness of their rights among the people as also their growing confidence in the Commission. It is a matter of great satisfaction that in almost all cases, Government authorities have complied with the NHRC's recommendations for providing relief and initiating action against errant officials.

Apart from enquiring into the complaints on the basis of reports it receives from various investigating agencies, the Commission also carries out independent visits to assess the situation on ground. During the period 2016-17, the Commission sent its own investigation teams for spot enquiries in 58 cases of alleged human rights violations, of which enquiries have been completed in all cases.

The Commission is making all-out efforts to make its complaint handling even more effective, and has accordingly, designed, developed and implemented a web-based version of Complaint Management System software using technical support of National Informatics Centre (NIC). This software has new, improved modules which help make the handling of complaints, even more effective. The latest ICT technology has been used in the software for informing status of complaints to complainants using SMS and emails.

The Commission's constant endeavour has been to make itself as accessible to the people as possible. It has tried to reach out to people from all walks of life, including those living in the remotest parts of the country. The NHRC has accordingly, been holding '*Camp Commission Sittings*' across States to ensure speedy disposal of human rights cases and direct interface with state officials, NGOs and members of civil society and the media. During 2016-17, the Commission organized its Camp Sittings in Bihar, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Odisha, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh. The Commission has also been holding '*Open Hearings*' across various States in the country, on complaints pertaining to atrocities against persons belong to the Scheduled Castes. During these hearings, the Commission takes up the complaints received, and also hears the grievances of persons belonging to the community and the problems they face in seeking justice from government agencies, in the presence of senior government functionaries.

In addition, the Commission has also been undertaking visits, through its Special Rapporteurs as well as its Officers and Staff to prisons, *anganwadi centres*, old age homes, homes for persons with disabilities, primary schools, and primary healthcare centres, among other such institutions, to assess the implementation of the various programmes of Government and take follow-up action for removal of observed shortcomings.

Section 12(f) of the PHR Act 1993 mandates the Commission to 'study treaties and other international instruments on human rights and make recommendations for their effective implementation.' While the NHRC has undertaken various initiatives in the past to fulfill this particular mandate, it is for the first time since the Commission's inception that a concerted effort has been made to bring about consonance between India's domestic legislations and the international human rights standards to which India is a State Party. Accordingly, the Commission has set up a ***Committee on International Conventions and Treaties*** comprising legal and administrative experts to guide the Commission along this direction. A meeting of the said Committee was also held and action plan has been decided in the area which is being taken forward.

Recently, the Commission appointed '**Special Monitors**' to oversee and report to the Commission on the following thematic issues – (a) Prison Conditions and (b) Communal Riots and Minorities. The Special Monitors appointed by the Commission are analogous to the Special Procedures under the United Nations

procedures. The appointment of Special Monitors has been undertaken with a view to further enhance the reach of the Commission as well as to strengthen the monitoring of these important thematic human rights issues.

To further strengthen human rights protection within the country, the Commission has taken numerous initiatives to strengthen and improve the operational capacities of State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs). So far, 26 States have constituted SHRCs and the Commission hopes that the remaining States will work pro-actively to set up these State Commissions at the earliest.

In order to create human rights awareness among members of the civil society, the Commission brings out publications such as its monthly newsletters, annual journal (both in English and Hindi), and other manuals and is consistently trying to get these publications circulated across the country so as to spread the message of human rights far and wide.

In accord with the mandate provided under Section 12 of the PHR Act, 1993 to 'spread human rights literacy', the Commission instituted a **Short Film Award Scheme**, with a view to promote and acknowledge cinematic and creative efforts in the field of human rights. The award carries a citation along with prize money of Rs. One Lakh, Rs.75 thousand and Rs.50 thousand for the first, second and third best films, respectively. The Commission, having received an enthusiastic response to this initiative in 2015, decided to continue with the said Scheme and accordingly, opened entries for the 'Short Film Awards' in 2016. In response, the

Commission received 94 film entries on a wide range of human rights issues, of which the three best entries were chosen by an eminent jury. In addition, the jury recommended four (04) films for a certificate of 'Special Mention' and another 11 films were recommended to be used by the Commission for human rights awareness.

I am happy to share that this initiative of the Commission has been very well received by the general public and thus, the Commission has invited entries for the Third Annual Competition for Short Films on Human Rights, 2017.

At the International level too, the Commission has and continues to play an active role in the promotion and protection of human rights. The NHRC, India is an 'A' Accredited NHRI and a Member of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). It is also a Founder Member of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF). During the year, the Commission actively participated in the annual meetings of these bodies and shared its best practices with other NHRIs of the region. We are also presently Member of the GANHRI Bureau which is the important policy-setting body of this organisation.

The Commission has submitted parallel country reports to the UN Human Rights Council for India's first, second and third Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In preparation for the Third UPR of India in May 2017, the Commission held regional consultations, including for the Northern, Eastern, Southern, Central, and

Western regions, as well as a National Consultation to prepare its report. More recently, the Commission's Joint Secretary also made an oral statement on India's Third UPR at the Plenary Session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017 in Geneva.

The National Human Rights Commission of India has been observing its 'Foundation Day' each year with a range of activities to commemorate the occasion. As part of this commemoration, the Commission organized a **Hindi essay competition** on the subject "**Terrorism and the present situation in the country**", whose winners will be felicitated this evening.

The Commission also organized a **painting competition** for the children of the officers and staff of the Commission. And unlike previous years, instead of assigning themes on which to draw, the Commission decided to allow the children the space and freedom to paint on any subject close to their hearts. The paintings made by the children are truly inspiring and reflect their perception and understanding of the world they inhabit. The Commission is extremely pleased to felicitate the winners of the painting competition on the occasion of its Foundation Day, today. I am happy to share that the Commission will also felicitate children of the Officers and Staff of the Commission who scored 90 per cent and above in their 10th and 12th Board exams last year. I believe that such encouragement to children will motivate them in pursuit of further excellence in their academic and professional pursuits.

NHRC, India represents the vision we have for our country – a vision of freedom, justice and equity, which is possible only with the active participation of all those present here and people across the country. I am confident that by incorporating human rights as a way of life, a fundamental change can be brought about to eradicate the scourge of poverty, ignorance, prejudices, and discrimination based on sex, caste, religion, disability and other forms, within our society.

I once again extend a hearty welcome to the Chief Guest, Justice Shri Dipak Misra ji, and to each one of you to this Foundation Day Function of the NHRC, particularly the artistes who have joined us today to enrich this evening with their delightful performances. I also extend my appreciation to the members of the staff of the Commission who will be showcasing their talent today, which one seldom has the chance to witness during the day-to-day course of official responsibilities.

I welcome you all once again and hope you will enjoy your evening with us today.

Thank you

JAI HIND