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MESSAGE ON EVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS DAY

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9th December, is an important day for the National Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Defenders spread across the country. On this day in 1998, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. It is a coincidence that the very next day, on December 10, we are celebrating the Human Rights Day. The Commission is mandated under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 to encourage the efforts of non-governmental organizations and institutions working in the field of human rights.

Human Rights Defenders play an important role in protection and promotion of human rights. Therefore, I take this opportunity to congratulate and greet each and every Human Rights Defender, NGOs, and members of the civil society who are working for the cause of the poor, voiceless and marginalized sections of the society and fight for their rights in a legitimate manner.

To respect, protect and promote human rights is the primary responsibility of the States and their agencies. The Constitution of India, through the Fundamental Rights contained in Chapter III, guarantees human rights for the people. A plethora of laws have been enacted by the Parliament and State Legislatures with the aim of ensuring welfare and basic human rights of everyone in accordance with the Directive Principles of State Policy as enshrined in Chapter IV of the Constitution. Several welfare schemes for the benefit of the weaker sections of the society are also in operation.

Millions of poor people from the weaker sections in the far flung areas of the country are, by and large, unaware of their rights and the remedial mechanisms available in the event of violations of rights. The Human Rights Defenders take up these issues with various authorities including NHRC and become the voice of the voiceless victims and defend their rights. This is an important and noble task that the Human Rights Defenders are performing. They also raise issues connected with developmental works and their impact on human rights, with the District/State authorities. This in turn, helps improve governance by taking corrective measures whenever required.

In its resolve to promote the efforts of Human Rights Defenders for protection of human rights, many initiatives have been taken by the Commission. Notable among them is creation of a Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders, who is accessible 24 x 7 on a Mobile phone and through e-mail. Inclusion of a chapter on Human Rights Defenders in the Annual Report and publication of "NHRC and

Human Rights Defenders: The Growing Synergy" is another milestone in this direction. The Commission organized an Online interaction with NGOs and Human Rights Defenders in May, 2021 to assess the ground realities of the Covid 19 Pandemic. In July 2021, another webinar on "Human Rights Issues" was also organized with the participation of large number of Human Rights Defenders, NGOs and members of the civil society. The recommendations of the said webinar are being pursued for timely compliance. The Commission also interacts with the Human Rights Defenders in its Camp Sitzings and Open Hearings.

NHRC gives special attention to complaints of alleged harassment of Human Rights Defenders. These complaints are registered under a separate category for proper monitoring and follow up for appropriate redressal of their grievances .

I once again extend my greetings and express my gratitude to all the Human Rights Defenders, NGOs and members of civil society for their bonafide human rights work and wish them all the very best in the coming year too.


(JUSTICE ARUN MISHRA)