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MESSAGE

By Resolution A/RES/53/144 dated 9th December, 1998, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, popularly known as "the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders". Significantly, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted on the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 'Human Rights Defender' is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. The date on which the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted i.e. "9th December" is traditionally observed as "the International Human Rights Defenders Day". The object of observing '9th December' as the Human Rights Defenders Day is to highlight and recognize the important role being played by Human Rights Defenders all over the world in the protection and promotion of human rights. The National Human Rights Commission considers the Human Rights Defenders as supporters, collaborators and partners in its endeavour to promote and protect human rights. In this connection, it may be mentioned that protection of human rights is a Constitutional value and a Constitutional goal in India. As per the Constitution of India, the State



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has an obligation to protect human rights and the citizen also has a duty to promote and protect human rights. Thus, in India protection of human rights is not merely an obligation of the State, but it is a duty of the citizen as well.

It is a matter of deep concern that in many countries, persons and organizations engaged in promoting and defending human rights and fundamental freedoms frequently face threats and harassment and suffer insecurity as a result of those activities, including through the curtailment of freedom of association or expression or the right to peaceful assembly or the abuse of civil or criminal proceedings. It is also to be observed that women human rights defenders are at the risk of and suffer from violations and abuses, including systematic violations and abuses of their fundamental rights to life, liberty and security of person, to psychological and physical integrity, to privacy and respect for private and family life and to freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly. They also experience gender based violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence, harassment and verbal abuse and attacks on reputation, online and offline, by State actors including law enforcement personnel and security forces, and non-State actors such as those related to family and community, in both public and private spheres. The General Assembly of the United Nations had to pass a Resolution on 18th December, 2013 for "Promotion of the Declaration



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on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms : protecting women human rights defenders”.

Hence, on the occasion of observing Human Rights Defenders Day, I, on behalf of the National Human Rights Commission, salute all the Human Rights Defenders including the women human rights defenders in India and express solidarity with them in their endeavour to protect and promote human rights. I appeal to the Central Government and State Governments to take effective steps for protecting the recognized rights of the human rights defenders. I also appeal to the citizens of India to realize that they have a Constitutional duty to protect human rights and that protection of human rights is impossible without protecting the human rights defenders.

I wish to share with the esteemed human rights defenders the following verses from the Bible:-

“Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied;

Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God;



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Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:

(Gospel according to Saint Mathew, Chapter V)

The Human Rights Defenders are persons who hunger and thirst for justice and who work for peace. Even if they are persecuted for the cause of justice, let us hope that the kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

New Delhi
December 9, 2015

Justice Cyriac Joseph
Acting Chairperson