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National Human Rights Commission

Minutes of the meeting of the One Day Open House Discussion on “RIGHTS OF FISHERMEN”

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India, in collaboration with Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University (DSNLU), Visakhapatnam, organized an Open House Discussion (OHD) on "Rights of Fishermen" on Saturday, 31st August 2024. The event took place at the DSNLU campus in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The discussion was presided over by the Hon'ble Acting Chairperson of the NHRC, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, with the esteemed Vice Chancellor, DSNLU; Prof. D. Surya Prakasa Rao served as the co-chair.



Figure 1 Welcoming and inauguration of the event by Hon'ble Acting Chairperson

2. The discussions featured speakers from various ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, and the fishermen community. Representatives from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) participated both online and in person. The offline attendees included academic and administrative staff, law graduates from the university, as well as 50 fishermen and their families. A detailed list of participants is provided in **Annexure**.



3. The Open House Discussion on 'Rights of Fishermen' broadly focused on three critical agendas, i) Addressing Human Rights Violations within India's Fishing Communities. ii) Fishing Rights and Environmental Concerns. iii) Social Security Measures/Welfare Schemes for the Fishermen Community. Each of the agendas was elaborately discussed in three sessions, which was followed by Open House Discussion and Valedictory session.



Figure 2 Audience listening to the address of Hon'ble Acting Chairperson

Inaugural Session

4. **Prof. Dr. Surya Prakasa Rao, Vice-Chancellor, DSNLU**, in his welcome address emphasized that law universities have a critical role in identifying, protecting, and enforcing rights, particularly for fishermen whose right to livelihood is fundamental. He highlighted the American Constitution's success in enforcing human rights and noted that in India, the Human Rights Act elevates Fundamental Rights to Human Rights. He acknowledged the role of NGOs, communities, and institutions, and stressed NHRC's pivotal role in safeguarding the civil rights of fishermen.



Figure 3 Vice Chancellor, DSNLU addressing the gathering

5. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC in her inaugural address highlighted the NHRC's commitment to protecting the rights of marginalized communities, including fishermen, who face dangerous conditions, inadequate medical facilities, and economic pressures forcing them to abandon their traditional livelihoods. She stressed the need for better safety measures and support for fishermen, highlighting their deep connection to the sea as intrinsic and vital. Citing a verse from Valmiki's Ramayana, she underscored that fishermen should not be driven away from their ancestral occupation. The NHRC aims to raise awareness of available schemes and provide targeted assistance, ensuring these communities are not left behind in the pursuit of constitutional rights and equality. She underlined that the fishermen community plays an important role in advancing India's economy. Therefore, protecting their rights and addressing the related challenges is vital for their livelihood with dignity.



Figure 4 Address by Hon'ble Chairperson



6. **Shri Dola Shankar, Commissioner (Fisheries), Government of Andhra Pradesh** pointed the importance of balancing human rights with human duties. While the government has launched numerous welfare schemes, a lack of community awareness and participation hinders their effectiveness. He highlighted the need for better communication from responsible departments and urged citizens to engage with local offices and NGOs to utilize these schemes. He stressed that rights come with responsibilities, and individuals should actively seek out and benefit from available resources.
7. **Shri Vishwa Chandranath Madasu, Registrar In-charge, DSNLU**, concluded the inaugural session by presenting the vote of thanks, and directed the forum towards the Technical Sessions.

Technical Session – I: Addressing Human Rights Violation in India’s Fishing Communities

8. **Shri K. Mohammad Koya, Fisheries Development Commissioner, Government of India** weighed on the significance of fisheries in the Indian economy, noting India's global leadership in aquaculture. Despite the industry's growth, challenges such as hazardous working conditions and human rights violations persist. India faces scrutiny over labor practices, especially as a major exporter. Ongoing efforts by the government and stakeholders aim to improve labor rights and working conditions in the fisheries sector.
9. **Prof. E. Udaya Bhasker Reddy, Former HoD, Andhra University** underscored the fundamental rights to life, livelihood, and a healthy environment, highlighting the adverse impact of human activities on the marine ecosystem. He stressed that oceans are crucial for survival and the need to protect the livelihoods of fishermen. Prof. Reddy pointed out the increasing pollution and micro-plastics in oceans, caused by industrial negligence, where fines are preferred over waste treatment.



Figure 5 Prof. Reddy stressed on 'save our souls, save our seas'

10. **Dr. Deepa Suman, Senior Executive (Tech), Chief Executive, National Fisheries Development Board**, introduced the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), a major initiative with 120-200 welfare programs for fishermen, including GPS tracking, safety kits, and crop insurance. Collaboration with CIBA and NFDB has improved fishing efficiency, saving time and fuel. Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) without collateral are being issued for job security, especially during fishing bans. ₹2 crores will be provided per climate-resilient coastal village for basic amenities. The scheme also promotes seaweed cultivation and other livelihood opportunities for women in coastal communities through the Sagar Mitra program. These initiatives aim to create sustainable and inclusive growth in the fisheries sector.



Figure 6 Dr. Suman shared information about central government schemes



11. **Shri Arjilli Dasu, Executive Director, District Fishermen's Youth Welfare Association (DFYWA), Visakhapatnam** raised concerns about longstanding issues faced by fishermen, refuting the claims of Ms. Deepa Suman; he questioned the government's failure to deliver promised benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana. He noted that the ₹20,000 crore allocations has not reached beneficiaries and questioned the scheme's future. He highlighted the lack of sanitation, proper equipment, and safety for fisherwomen. Additionally, he pointed out that fishermen are not receiving benefits under the Kisan Credit Card or other subsidies, urging effective policy implementation.



Figure 7 Mr. Dasu highlighted the challenges of fishworkers

12. **Mr. N. Venugopalan, Programme Manager, International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF)** dwelled upon the need to balance community and individual needs to improve the welfare of traditional fishermen and their families. He highlighted poor living conditions in the fishing sector, noting that only 60% have access to proper toilet facilities and that 45% of India's coastal areas are prone to sea erosion. He also discussed the severe impact of climate change on fishermen, including rising sea levels and unpredictable weather. Venugopalan called for sustainable fishing practices, resilient infrastructure, adherence to international conventions, and tailored government schemes to support fishermen.



Technical Session – II: Fishing Rights and Environmental Issues

13. **Dr. Joe K. Kizhakudan, Principal Scientist and Head, ICAR – CMFRI** spotlighted the critical issue of fishermen's rights being compromised due to political inefficacy and inadequate governance. In comparing Andhra Pradesh with Maharashtra, Dr. Kizhakudan observed that fishermen in Maharashtra experience a superior standard of living. He highlighted Tamil Nadu's effective Panchayat system, which provides a well-organized framework for fishing activities, in contrast to Andhra Pradesh, where such systems are fragmented, leading to insufficient attention to fishermen's concerns. Dr. Kizhakudan further noted that fishermen from Srikakulam had been compelled to migrate to Puri, Odisha, due to adverse conditions in Andhra Pradesh, underscoring the urgent need for state-level intervention. He also pointed out the concerning trend of declining numbers among smaller fishermen, such as those in Chittah, which necessitates immediate policy attention. Dr. Kizhakudan expressed optimism that relevant departments in Andhra Pradesh would recognize and address these issues, thereby fostering a more supportive and organized environment for fishermen and ensuring the protection and enhancement of their rights and livelihoods.



Figure 8 Dr. Joe highlighted the plight of fishermen migration due to ineffective state policy

14. **Dr. S.S. Raju, Principal Scientist and Head, ICAR – CMFRI** highlighted the challenges faced by fishermen, who are often trapped in generational cycles of the



profession due to a lack of alternative job opportunities. This persistence in a disliked occupation is compounded by inadequate infrastructure, including poor roads, transportation, and sanitation facilities. Many fishermen face educational deficits and high-interest loans, worsening their poverty. Environmental issues, such as industrial waste damaging aquatic life, further threaten their livelihoods. Dr. Raju recommended government interventions; including establishing a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for fish and implementing safety measures, to improve living conditions and break the cycle of hardship.

15. **Dr. Divya Karnad, Co-founder In Season Fish and Assistant Professor, Ashoka University** laid stress on the urgent need for sustainable marine conservation and fisheries management to protect ocean ecosystems and ensure future food security. She discussed the impact of climate change on fish populations and advocated for adaptive strategies in aquaculture. Highlighting the risks of overfishing and resource depletion, Dr. Karnad called for cooperative efforts and strong policies. She concluded by advocating for a holistic approach that integrates scientific research, community involvement, and effective policies to preserve marine resources for future generations.
16. **Prof. V. Raja Lakshmi, Emeritus Professor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar College of Law, Andhra University** accentuated that the right to fish should be accessible to all, including both small-scale and commercial fishermen. The government's priority must be to protect small fishermen's rights at national and international levels, ensuring recognition and support for traditional fishermen whose families have depended on fishing for generations. Essential support includes interest-free loans, life insurance, healthcare, and education to enhance their well-being and economic stability. Stronger laws and protections are needed. Adopting a human rights approach, as advocated by the FAO, should address both community and individual needs within these fishing communities.



Figure 9 Prof. Rajalakshmi expressed the need to enhance living of fishermen

Technical Session – III: Social Security Measures/ Welfare Schemes for the Fishermen Community

17. **Dr. Ch. Benarji, Dean and Professor of Law, School of Law, VIT-AP University** draws attention to the significance of The Law of the Seas, using the Erica Lexis case to illustrate key points. He referenced Ram Mohan Naidu's query regarding Indian fishermen arrested in Bangladesh, highlighting the plight of those captured in foreign waters. Dr. Benarji stressed the need for legal mechanisms to protect fishermen and educate them about their rights and maritime laws. He emphasized the role of local law schools, like DSNLU, in raising awareness and developing legal frameworks for inadvertent boundary crossings. He also noted the necessity of insurance coverage for fishermen and sustainable resource management, citing the example of Lakshadweep.
18. **Dr. K. Sudha, Assistant Professor, DSNLU** summarized the event, emphasizing the need for adequate compensation and rehabilitation for fishermen whose lands are acquired. She highlighted the multidimensional rights of fishermen and women, including dignity, livelihood, and shelter, stressing the importance of respecting these rights in policy considerations.



Open House Discussion

19. **Shri P. C. Apparao, Representative from Fishermen Community** stressed on the several critical issues facing the fishermen community. He highlighted the severe impact of ocean pollution from industrial waste on both the environment and fishermen's livelihoods. He then criticized the restrictions on fishing areas and the high cost of boats that many fishermen cannot afford. He also noted the inadequacy and poor implementation of existing schemes. Emphasizing the need for lighthouses to ensure safety, he compared the substandard conditions of Indian fishermen with those in other countries. He advocated for pension and insurance schemes for fishermen age over 50, or those unable to work. Lastly, he concluded by recommending that schemes be developed in consultation with stakeholders to ensure effective implementation and benefits.
20. **Shri P. Vasu, Representative from Fishermen Community** outlined severe issues faced by fishermen, emphasizing the detrimental impact of government projects displacing them from their homes without compensation. This has led to migration to other states in search of better living conditions. The lack of awareness about India's territorial boundaries results in fishermen accidentally crossing into foreign waters, where they face arrest and false charges. He expressed distress over deceased fishermen being returned in fish ice boxes, highlighting the inhumane treatment. Shri Vasu criticized the poor implementation of the PMMSY scheme, noting that some fishermen are blacklisted from the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme. He also raised concerns about arbitrary denial of pensionary benefits by authorities.



Figure 10 Representative from fishing community expressing their issues

21. The meeting concluded with **Prof. N.A.D. Paul, Assistant Professor, DSNLU** delivering the vote of thanks, acknowledging the contributions of the attendees and the responsibility entrusted by NHRC for hosting the event at DSNLU.



Annexure

List of Participants

NHRC Officials/Staffs

1. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson
2. Mr. Abhishek Kumar Sharma, Junior Research Consultant

DSNLU Officials and Other Speakers

1. Prof. Dr. Surya Prakasa Rao, Vice-Chancellor
2. Shri Vishwa Chandranath Madasu, Registrar In-charge
3. Dr. K. Sudha, Assistant Professor
4. Dr. N.A.D Paul, Assistant Professor
5. Shri Dola Shankar, Commissioner (Fisheries), Government of Andhra Pradesh
6. Shri. K. Mohammad Koya, Fisheries Development Commissioner, Department of Fisheries, Government of India
7. Prof. E. Udaya Bhasker Reddy, Former HoD, Department of Environmental Sciences, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam
8. Dr. Deepa Suman, Senior Executive (Tech), Chief Executive, National Fisheries Development Board
9. Arjilli Dasu, Executive Director, District Fishermen's Youth Welfare Association (DFYWA), Visakhapatnam
10. Mr. N. Venugopalan, Programme Manager, International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF)
11. Dr. Joe K. Kizhakudan, Principal Scientist and Head, ICAR – CMFRI, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute
12. Dr. S.S. Raju, Principal Scientist and Head, ICAR – CMFRI, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute



13. Dr. Divya Karnad, Co-founder InSeason Fish, Assistant Professor, Ashoka University

14. Prof. V. Raja Lakshmi, Emeritus Professor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar College of Law, Andhra University

15. Dr. Ch. Benarji, Dean and Professor of Law, School of Law, VIT-AP University

16. P. C. Apparao, Representative from Fishermen Community

17. P. Vasu, Representative from Fishermen Community

Audiences

1. 150+ Students of DSNLU
2. 50 Representatives from Fishing Community