

**National Human Rights Commission
Law Division**

**Minutes of the Interactive Session with the Human Rights Defenders
(HRDs), CSOs and NGOs, held on 05th September, 2023**

Mr. Justice Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission chaired the meeting. The list of participants is enclosed at Annexure -I

Shri Surajit Dey, Registrar of National Human Rights Commission, in his inaugural address stated about the importance of the HRDs and extended a warm welcome to all the offline and online participants. He emphasized the significance of protecting human rights as a fundamental responsibility.

Shri Bharat Lal, the Secretary General of National Human Rights Commission, spoke about the mission of the Commission, which is to identify ways to collaborate with HRDs nationwide to protect and promote the human rights of the vulnerable sections of the society. He highlighted the importance of feedback, suggestions, and innovative ideas from the HRDs in refining and enhancing the outreach of the Commission to achieve the common goal to uphold human rights of the grass root people.

Justice Shri Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson welcomed the participants and stated about the importance of the interaction with the Human Rights Defenders and how it can further be improved.

Shri Shomik Ray (Public Health Foundation of India): Emphasized the importance of incorporating human rights education in classrooms and offered collaboration in training, capacity building, and integrating human rights courses.

Shri Hemraj (Nyay Network) discussed about the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of sexual exploitation, child labour, and forced labour. He highlighted the success rate of NHRC interventions and suggested the need for better sensitization of officials.

Shri Sandeep Chachra (Action Aid Association) appreciated the NHRC's outreach efforts and proposed further decentralization of training and redressal mechanisms involving Gram Sabhas and Panchayats. He suggested collaboration with the National Commission for

Women (NCW) to address women's rights and training. He further advocated for addressing human rights issues where there is lack of established framework for redressal of human rights violation, such as issues related to Nomadic & pastoralists, fisher communities, and people dependent on natural resources.

Shri Rajeev Sharma mentioned about the hardships faced by HRDs, including attacks and false implications. He requested for protection for HRDs, possibly through the issuance of identification cards after background checks. He submitted that HRDs should be allowed to bring the incidents of human rights violation to the notice of the Commission as many victims have got relief by such intervention of the Commission. Hon'ble Chairperson clarified that there is no bar in sending any complaint to the Commission about any incident/victim. The cases will be dealt with on merits.

Shri Sanjay and Shri Moosa Azmi (Asian Bridge India, Varanasi) highlighted the issue of violence against women and urged NHRC's support for LGBTQI+ organizations. He emphasized the need for behavioural changes, education, and community awareness.

Shri Suhaz Chakma stated that he has been associated with NHRC since the very inception. He appreciated the efforts put in by NHRC to bring together all the HRDs. Then he went on say that some of HRDs working at the ground level do not have the understanding of working, mandate and functions of NHRC. Thus, educating people and making them aware about NHRC is extremely important. He suggested that NHRC should indulge in some capacity building activities in collaboration with NGOs or SHRCs. He also said that NHRC should try to increase its outreach so that more and more civil society and other HRDs understand the working of NHRC and they too approach the Commission seamlessly.

Shri Manish(Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan) mentioned that the women of Bundelkhand region drive the economy and that currently it is undergoing a drought like situation. Due to lack of knowledge and education, these women do not know about their right to water. They also do not know whom to approach for such problems. He highlighted the issue of girl child dropping out from school and an increase in the number of old age and handicapped people in the village. Thus, the only way to tackle these situations is through creating awareness and educating the masses about their human rights.

Shri Sandeep Verma and Shri Mohit (National Hawker Federation, Delhi) raised their concerns regarding the plight of street vendors all across India. They said that despite there being a Street Vendors Act, 2014, decision of the Supreme Court none of the authorities follow the rules laid down in the Act & in the judgement. They end up harassing the poor street vendors, thus raising the issue that there is no implementation of the law. Those HRDs who work for these victims are arrested by the police and harassed without filing any charge sheet in the court. They also said that neither the survey is conducted properly nor is the rehabilitation programme beneficial for the street vendors. There is a dire need to help these vendors as they drive the economy, being the largest part of the unorganised sector in India.

Shri Radha Kanta Tripathy brought to light the plight of the poor and the uneducated in the backward districts of Odisha. He said that due to lack of digital literacy most of the people do not get the benefits of the social security schemes. There is a lack of staff in PHCs, Anganwadis, and other government schools in local panchayat areas. He also said that man animal conflict is a major concern and the victims do not get their compensation on time. He suggested that the NHRC should be the ex officio member from the Transgender council. He then proposed that NHRC can help all, only if the people are educated and awareness is created amongst all.

Shri Rajiv Jain, Member appreciated the efforts made by the HRDs and NGOs in their collaboration approach to address the issue of human rights in the lower strata of the society.

Dr. DM Mulay, Member expressed his concern after listening to the plight and situation of the street vendors in India. He also appreciated the suggestion that NHRC should work in collaboration with the Panchayat and Gram Sabha at the grass root level and that more complaints from East, South and West India should be encouraged.

Hon'ble Chairperson, NHRC also thanked the HRDs for bringing forward and educating everyone about the street vendors problems and said that digital literacy should be encouraged and it is the only solution to reach every nook and corner of the country. He stated that "*Online is the Way*" to move forward. He promised to encourage and protect the HRDs who are true eyes and ears of NHRC. NHRC expressed gratitude to the HRDs for their valuable contributions and pledged to work closely with them to protect and promote human rights in the country.

The interactive session ended with a vote of thanks from Mr. Indrajeet Kumar, Deputy Registrar(Law) and the Focal Point for Human rights Defenders.

Apart from the above who participated in the Interaction, the following HRDs/representatives of CSOs/NGOs submitted their inputs for the meeting through email/whatsapp. The salient suggestions are as under-

Manjula Pradeep, Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network(DHRDNet) is an HRD who is part of 3 organisations and works for the Dalit community by combating caste based violence. She also works on gender based violence and issues effecting women and girls from marginalised community. Some of the suggestions given by her are- NHRC should work in the area of proper implementation of the SC/ST(Prevention of Atrocity) Act. She wants that the bill drafted by Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network and The National Council of Women Leaders have in collaboration to protect the couples in inter caste and interfaith marriages should be supported by NHRC. She also suggested that NHRC should improve the access to justice for the victims of human rights violations and should build awareness and promote human rights education through training sessions, workshops and skill sharing programme. Ms Manjula has mainly focused on the collaboration between her organisations and NHRC so that human rights is enjoyed even at the grass root level.

Naseema Khatoon, Parcham who works extensively for the rights of the women (sex worker, victims of human trafficking) and transgender. She wants that the Transgenders and women should be made a part of Advisory Group of NHRC so that the Commission gets to know about the reality. She has also pointed out the fact that all the policy/ schemes meant for sex workers apply only to those who are females below 35 years of age. She wants the inclusion of all sex workers irrespective of age or gender. She is also seeking a protection of the victims once they are put in the rehabilitation schemes and a stronger implementation of CEDAW principles and POSH Act in India, so that all the women feel safe and protected. Issues like proper rehabilitation measures, awareness programme by NHRC for HRDs upto Block level has also been highlighted by her.

List of Participants**NHRC Officials**

1. Mr. Justice Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson, NHRC
2. Dr. D M Mulay, Hon'ble Member, NHRC
3. Mr. Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Member, NHRC
4. Mr. Surajit Dey, Registrar (Law), NHRC
5. Ms. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC
6. Mr. Indrajeet Kumar, Dy. Registrar (Law) and Focal Point for HRDs
7. Mr. Sanjeev Sharma, SSA

HRDs and Representatives from CSOs/NGOs

1. Mr. Suhas Chakma, Director, Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) (Online)
2. Mr. Sandeep Chachra, Executive Director, Action Aid Association
3. Mr. Radha Kanta Tripathy, Advocate (Online)
4. Manish, Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan (Online)
5. Moosa Azmi from Asian Bridge India, Varanasi (Online)
6. Sanjay from Asian Bridge India, Varanasi
7. Sandeep Verma, National Hawker Federation, Delhi
8. Mohit, National Hawker Federation, Delhi
9. Rajiv Kumar Sharma, Human Rights Activist
10. Hemraj, Nyay Network
12. Shomik Ray, Public Health Foundation of India
13. Murugappan, Social Awareness Society for Youths(SASY) (Online)
14. Manjula Pradeep, Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network(DHRDNet)(e-mail input)
15. Naseema Khatoon, Parcham(whatsapp input)