

Welcome Address by Secretary General, NHRC on the occasion of Human Rights Day, 2020

Chief Guest of this morning – Hon'ble Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Nityanand Rai Ji, Hon'ble Members of the Commission- Justice Shri P.C. Pant, Smt Jyotika Kalra and Dr. D. M. Mulay; Former Chairpersons & Secretary Generals of NHRC; Chairpersons and Members of SHRCs, Secretaries to Govt. of India; Representatives of UN Bodies, Diplomates, Special Rapporteurs, Monitors, Core Group Members, Members of the Civil Society, NGOs, Media, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Commission, I extend a very warm welcome to the Chief Guest and all other guests and dignitaries on this occasion of 'Human Rights Day'.

2. 10th December marks the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by India and other Member States of the UN General Assembly.

- 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' is an embodiment of the aspirations of the people across the World for achieving equality, dignity and peaceful co-existence.

3. On this day, we must recall the contribution of Smt. Hansa Mehta, who played crucial role in drafting the Constitution of India and final draft of the Universal Declaration. She is recognized as the 'First Lady of the World' for her contribution to the cause of Human Rights.

4. We won our independence in 1947. Our Constitution came into effect in January 1950. The Indian Constitution is not merely a legal document, but represents the hopes and aspirations of billion plus people. For all of us, democracy is not a GIFT, but a sacred trust. Everytime, a child or a woman is brutalized, the soul of India is wounded.

5. Year 2020 has been extremely tough for humanity due to Covid-19 Pandemic. The social and economic impacts of this Human Health Emergency is falling disproportionately on all sections of the society everywhere. India also faces unprecedented challenges in context of COVID-19.

6. The theme of Human Rights Day 2020 is 'Recover Better- Stand up for Human Rights'

The Global campaign for Human Rights Day this year is centered on four pillars:

- a) End discrimination of any kind.
- b) Address Inequalities

c) Encourage Participation and solidarity and

d) Promote Sustainable Development.

- India's Recovery Efforts, such as 'Atma Nirbhar Campaign' and Hon'ble Prime Minister's- Garib Kalyan Yojana is in sync with the theme i.e. 'NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND'

7. The Commission, cognizant of the adverse impact of Covid-19, made the Complaint Handling Process completely on-line through the HRCNet Portal. Our on-line complaint filing system is linked to 3 lakhs Common Service Centres.

- During March-November 2020, despite Covid-19, Lockdown reduced staff strength, Commission has disposed off 40,000+ cases out of registered 46,000+ cases.
- Commission constituted a 'Committee of Experts on impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and future response'. Committee included Civil Society representatives, thematic experts, representatives of Govt. Ministries and Departments. Based on the recommendations of the Expert Committee, Commission has issued 12 advisories on the issues such as Rights of Informal Workers, Rights of Children, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Right to Food, Rights of Transgenders, among others to the Union and State Governments.

- Commission looks forward that these advisories are taken on board. We shall welcome additional discussions and consultations on these critical human rights issues.

8. The Commission values its partnerships with Civil Society, Media, and UN Bodies. We look forward for your valuable inputs and suggestions on how we can work better.

9. Commission has been publishing its Annual English Journal since 2002. The Journal of the Commission is a valuable tool for Good Governance and the Annual Journal gives us motivation to work relentlessly for cause of human rights.

10. India has been playing an important role in making development, a human rights issue – our right to survival in face of climate change. Our rights to sustainable growth that leaves no one behind. We must take it forward in our Global recovery efforts in coming years.

11. India has historically played an important role in making development a human rights issue. The Indian tradition of 'SARVODAYA' – the promise and guarantee of basic freedoms, justice and equality – is alive and vibrant today.

- COVID 19 has made it clear that a strong base of human rights is our defence against global shocks. All

of us are also aware the ROAD Ahead must be paved on a strong foundation of human rights.

12. The ideal way for the whole world to commemorate the 'Human Rights Day' is to introspect, what more can we do to live upto the letter and spirit of the sacred text of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- We must take a pledge to uphold the ideals and principles enshrined in our Constitution and UDHR.
- Promotion and protection of Human Rights has to be a collective task of the whole of society. – Gender Equality Universal Health Coverage, Public Participation, Climate Justice and Sustainable Development to be core themes.
- Let us resolve to act collectively, with human rights front and centre, to recover from Covid-19 Pandemic and build a better future for all.

Let us act collectively to build a better future for all.

Thank you