

Welcome address by
Shri Bharat Lal,
Secretary General
on
Foundation day of NHRC, India
12th October, 2023

Good evening everyone!

Namaskar !

Thirty years back, on this day, National Human Rights Commission was established. Today, we have assembled here to celebrate the Foundation Day and this meaningful journey. I am honored to stand here and extend a very warm welcome to each one of you on behalf of the National Human Rights Commission and on my personal behalf.

It is indeed a privilege to have with us today Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble Former President of India. Sir, your presence has not only enriched this event but also a testament to the shared values and commitment of the people of India.

The 14th President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, started his journey from a village of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. He chose public service and legal profession to serve the people. After serving two terms in Rajya Sabha as Member of Parliament and later on as Governor of Bihar, he became the President of the Republic.

His tenure as the President of India was marked by his statesmanship, integrity, and dedication to the welfare of the people. As the President of the Republic, he left behind a rich legacy of service and leadership.

During his illustrious career, he always worked to uphold the constitutional values, took various social causes, including education for under-privileged children, environmental conservation, and promotion of inclusivity and diversity in Indian society.

His focus on strengthening India's relations especially with countries of Global South enhanced India's standing and strengthened its ties. He extensively travelled to the countries of Global South and in India, remote and far flung places to be with the people.

He dedicated his whole life to public service and remained committed to promoting the spirit of unity, diversity, and social harmony in India.

By being here with us, you have honoured the whole human rights fraternity who are working to protect and promote human rights of every human being in the country. Sir, your life and work, is a source of inspiration to all of us.

May I request all of you to welcome him with a round of applause!

You all know Justice Shri Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson of the Commission very well. His silent but very effective way of working in a campaign mode to protect human rights is showing the results. His commitment to poor and vulnerable sections of society and protection of environment has given a new direction to the Commission. His sensitivity to

people's problems and commitment inspire everyone at the Commission. On your behalf, I welcome Justice Shri Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson of the Commission.

I also extend a warm welcome to Dr. D. M. Mulay, and Shri Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Members of the Commission. Their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment inspired all of us. We are grateful to both of you Sir for your continued guidance.

I also welcome Ex-officio members of the Commission.

I also welcome Hon'ble Members of Lokpal, Chairpersons and Members of other Statutory Bodies; members of Diplomatic Corps, Former Judges of Supreme Court and High Courts, Chairpersons & Members of the State Human Rights Commissions; the members of legal fraternity; seniors officers of the Central and State governments/ UT Administrations; Special Rapporteurs, Monitors and members of the Core Groups of NHRC; Special Invitees; Human Rights Defenders; Academicians; representatives of civil society, business and media.

I extend a very special welcome to our young professionals and students, who are carrying forward this rich legacy in future. Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

This day holds immense significance to every victim of human rights violations as well as to human right defenders. This day not only marks the inception of NHRC, but also reinforces our collective commitment to uphold the fundamental rights and dignity of every individual.

India, home to 1.43 billion people and an ancient civilization, has a deeply ingrained democratic culture. All of us were raised with the ideals of equality, liberty, justice, and fraternity. Empathy and compassion for all beings are fundamental to our life.

As we reflect upon the journey of NHRC since its inception, we are reminded of the pivotal role it has played in promoting and protecting human rights across the country.

The milestones achieved, the lives touched, and the positive changes brought about, stand as a testament to the dedication and tireless efforts of all those associated with this noble cause.

During the 30 years of its journey, the Commission has resolved more than 22 lakh cases and recommended the payment of monetary relief of more than Rs. 230 crores to the victims of human rights violations. It has reviewed innumerable bills and laws, and brought out more than 100 publications.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has also developed the Human Rights Commissions Network (HRCNet), a portal which is also used by State Human Rights Commissions for Online Complaints Lodging/ tracking and handling of complaints received offline, i.e. by hand, post, and so on.

The online complaint filing system is also linked with over 5 Lakh Common Service Centers and the National Government Services Portal.

The idea behind this digitization is to empower people especially those in distress. On this portal, anyone from anywhere can file the complaint with NHRC or respective State Human Rights Commission. It also helps in avoiding duplication and ensures transparency.

During the last year till last month, the Commission received 83 thousand complaints and resolved over 89 thousand cases, clearly indicating its enhanced efficiency. The Commission recommended more than Rs. 16 crore in monetary reliefs to victims. During this period, it also registered 123 cases on its own. This demonstrates the commission's commitment and prompt action in dealing with an ordinary person's cases.

In the past year, the NHRC issued advisories, including Rights of Truck Drivers; Environmental Pollution and Degradation; Advisory for ensuring the welfare of Transgender Persons; Advisory to mitigate Deliberate Self Harm and suicide attempts by prisoners; Child Sexual abuse Material; and Advisory to Prevent, Minimize, and Mitigate Ocular Trauma, amongst others.

The Special Rapporteurs and Special Monitors of the Commission are human rights experts who are specifically appointed with the aim to report and advice on human rights concerns from a thematic or state-specific perspective, and oversee or investigate specific human rights issues, cases, or situations. They are eyes and ears of the Commission.

The NHRC has actively promoted awareness and education on human rights. It conducts workshops, seminars, and training programs to sensitize government officials, law enforcement agencies, and the general public about human rights principles and standards. The NHRC mechanism and ethos are introduced to society at large through an internship programme that is both online and offline, moot court competitions, as well as visit of various campuses.

Recently, in July, we organized a meet on Mental Health Issues and based on the recommendations and further deliberations in the Commission, on the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10th October, NHRC issued an 'Advisory on Mental Health' to promote the welfare and rights of persons with mental illnesses.

The Commission had also organized a two-day national conference on Child Sexual Abuse Material, with an objective to advocate safe cyberspace for our children.

Air pollution is one of the major concerns particularly rising levels of air pollution in Delhi – NCR. The Commission took cognizance as it was dissatisfied with the various actions taken thus far to address the issue. Now, the Commission is nudging various authorities to comply with the statutory provisions and make concerted efforts to improve the AQI. Climate, business and human right is another inter-section, wherein Commission is working with concerned stakeholders to advance human rights in business and industry.

The Commission has also taken an active role in international human rights forums such as the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), and the UN Human Rights Council. Last month, it successfully hosted a two-day conference of Asia Pacific NHRIs and build consensus to come out with 'Delhi Declaration'.

This special day is not only to celebrate the history and contributions of the Commission but also look ahead for a better tomorrow. Let us envision a society where human rights are not just a legal framework but a way of life, where empathy and compassion guide our actions, and where every individual is treated with respect and dignity.

I express my deepest gratitude to all of you for being a part of this endeavour. Your presence here today not only honors the Commission but also reaffirms our shared commitment to protect and promote the human rights of every human being. Together, let us continue this beautiful journey, striving for a tomorrow where the flame of justice and humanity burns brightly for all to see. Once again, I welcome all of you to this Foundation Day function of NHRC.

Thank you!
