

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,**

**SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND**

**ON THE OCCASION OF LAUNCH OF PAN INDIA LEGAL  
AWARENESS AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN OF NATIONAL  
LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA)**

**New Delhi, October 02, 2021**

It gives me immense pleasure to launch the awareness and outreach programs of NALSA being organized as a part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate 75 years of India's independence. We know that our freedom struggle was led by many great lawyers who also strived to make our society more progressive. They envisioned a society based on Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These fundamental principles have been enshrined in our Constitution. Since independence, we have made substantial progress in realizing our Constitutional goals, but a lot of work remains to be done to reach the destinations identified by our founding fathers.

I commend NALSA for its vision to promote an inclusive legal system to ensure fair and meaningful justice to marginalized and disadvantaged sections. I am glad that NALSA is working towards our Constitutional objective of providing equal and barrier-free access to justice.

I compliment also NALSA for launching this awareness drive on Gandhi Jayanti. Mahatma Gandhi is a symbol of service to humanity, including services to help the downtrodden get justice. Earlier this morning, I went to Rajghat and paid my respect to Mahatma Gandhi.

More than 125 years ago, Gandhiji had set certain examples which are relevant to the entire legal fraternity even today. In his first major case in South Africa, Gandhiji suggested the parties to seek a compromise out of court. The parties agreed on an arbitrator who

heard the case and decided in favour of Gandhiji's client. This resulted in a heavy financial burden on the other party. Gandhiji convinced his own client to permit the losing party to make payments in easy instalments over a very extended period. Consequently both the parties felt relieved by that settlement. Prior to the settlement, the cost of litigation was harming both the parties. That experience reinforced Gandhiji's opinion that out-of-court settlements were preferable to litigation. He followed this approach throughout his legal practice of two decades, before devoting himself full time to pursuit of political, social, and spiritual goals. Gandhiji had a flourishing legal practice with handsome income as a lawyer in South Africa. But he did a lot of pro bono work to help the poor. Gandhiji had said and [I quote] "A true lawyer is one who places truth and service in the first place and the emoluments of the profession in the next place only" [Unquote]. Indentured labourers in South Africa looked up to Gandhiji for taking up their cause with the authorities and in the courts. Gandhiji helped them without charging any fees.

After returning to India in 1915 and watching rich lawyers earning at the cost of poor litigants, Gandhiji wrote and [I quote] "The best legal talent must be available to the poorest at reasonable rates" [Unquote]. I feel that this advice of Bapu should be followed by the legal fraternity, especially designated senior advocates in Supreme Court and High Courts. Such advocates should earmark a certain part of their time to provide pro bono services to people from the weaker sections. When I suggest this, I have in my mind eminent lawyers like the late Ashoke Sen, a former Union Law Minister, who guided me during my days as a lawyer and inspired me to provide pro bono service to people from the weaker sections. I have always felt indebted to him for his invaluable guidance. I wish more and more lawyers followed his passion for pursuit of justice for everyone.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been told that through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, legal services authorities have helped in resolution of

millions of cases every year. For this helpful intervention, I convey my appreciation to every member of the nearly 3,000 National Law Services Institutions across the country. I am happy to know that many of them are connected online with this program, right down to the Taluka level, along with beneficiaries of legal services. I am told that with a multi-stakeholder approach, para legal volunteers, anganwadi and asha workers, and administration personnel are also being involved in this legal-services-outreach. I am sure that they will make meaningful contribution in making access to justice easier for our weaker sections. Special efforts to reach people in the rural and far-flung areas, including tribal population, are highly commendable. This effort gives practical expression to those lines of NALSA's theme song which we heard a little earlier:

ये ना सोचो दर्द हमारा, कहीं सुना ना जाएगा;

अब न्यायालय खुद ही चलकर, चौपालों तक आएगा।

This noble initiative of bringing justice to the doorsteps of people is much needed for us to become a truly just and fair society. Instead of thinking of themselves as generous providers of legal aid, members of the Legal Services Institutions should operate from the mindset of dutiful providers of legal services to the people of India.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our ancient tradition highlighted the need for equal access to justice. It condemned what was called Matsya-nyaya which means the big fish eats the smaller fish. Disputes were resolved through amicable settlement. Respectful references to Panch-Parameshwar highlight the value attached to humane dispensation of justice. Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms such as mediations, conciliations and Lok Adalats remind us of our ancient values of peace and justice. In modern India too, since our independence, we began moving forward from an era of judicial aristocracy to the direction of judicial democracy. NALSA has been playing an important role in this journey since its system became operational 25 years ago. I have been informed that during the previous two

years, more than one crore eleven lakh pending and pre litigation cases have been disposed off by Lok Adalats. Such disposal by Lok Adalats reduces the burden on the judicial system. I congratulate Chief Justice of India Justice N.V. Ramana and Justice U.U. Lalit for infusing new energy in the system of Lok Adalat and thereby helping dispense speedy justice for our citizens.

The structure of legal services institutions provides support to our judicial architecture and strengthens it at the national, state, district, and sub-division levels. This support and strength are critical for serving the large number of vulnerable people.

I expect Legal Services Authorities to make special efforts to disseminate awareness regarding the rights and entitlements of citizens, particularly among those who are socially and economically backward. I believe that the lack of awareness hampers implementation of welfare policies formulated by the State, as the actual beneficiaries remain unaware of their entitlements.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to note that NALSA's action plan includes awareness-related-material in vernacular languages. Vernacular languages make justice more accessible to ordinary people. I appreciate the recent initiative by NALSA of providing 'Legal Services Mobile Application'. I am sure that NALSA will find many more ways of adopting technology to increase outreach of its legal services.

I am also happy to note that the legal services institutions responded to the crisis caused by Covid-pandemic with remarkable dedication. They helped the affected people, especially women, senior citizens, daily wage earners and migrant labourers. Even non-legal needs of such people were addressed on humanitarian grounds. Legal services institutions kept providing certain services despite physical closure of courts and other premises.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I observe that there are about 11,000 women lawyers among over 47,000 panel advocates at the district level and about 17,000 women Para–Legal Volunteers out of the total number of nearly 44,000. I have been told that NALSA is making efforts to be more inclusive in engagement of advocates and para legal volunteers. As a country, our aim is to graduate from ‘women development’ to ‘women-led development’. Therefore, increasing the number of women in National Legal Services Institutions is as important as reaching out to the largest possible number of women beneficiaries.

It is thoughtful of NALSA to have students from law colleges attend this program. On the young shoulders of such students rests the responsibility of shaping the India of the future. Law colleges should adopt villages for providing legal services. Project reports concerning legal services for the poor and rural population should be part of curriculum for law students. I am sure that this generation of young law students will contribute to the making of an India which will be a role model for the global community in terms of socio-economic development parameters. Their generation will build and see the India of 2047 when the country will be celebrating 100 years of its independence. I am sure that the India led by them will showcase a society where prosperity and happiness will be complemented by Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

I wish the teams of Legal Services Institutions all success in their endeavours.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!