

**11<sup>TH</sup> ALL INDIA MEET OF STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITIES  
- INAUGURAL SESSION -  
- 20.4.2013 – 10.00 AM –  
ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE**

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My Lord the Honourable the Chief Justice of India,

Hon'ble Mr. Justice P.Sathasivam, Executive Chairman, NALSA,

Dr. Ashwani Kumar, Honourable Union Law Minister,

Hon'ble Mr.Justice A.K.Patnaik, Judge, Supreme Court of India  
and Chairman, Supreme Court Legal Services Committee,

Hon'ble Mr.Justice F.M. Ibrahim Kalifulla, Judge, Supreme  
Court of India,

Brothers Mr.Justice D. Murugesan and Mr.Justice C. Nagappan,  
Chief Justices of Delhi and Orissa High Courts,

Brothers Mr. Justice Elipe Dharma Rao and sisters Mrs. Justice  
R.Banumathi and Mrs. Justice Chitra Venkataraman,

Brother and sister Judges of Madras High Court, Executive  
Chairmen of State Legal Services Authorities

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning to you all,

We are here to discuss ways and means to enable the  
needy to access justice and realisation of rights to all. There  
will be four sessions from afternoon, three of which will see the  
participation of the Honourable the Chief Justice of India. His

Lordship had been Executive Chairman, NALSA for a long time and His Lordship has been instrumental for various innovations of NALSA like legal services to transgender people, legal aid clinics in villages to be manned by para legal volunteers, initiation of legal literacy programmes and school legal literacy clubs in schools and colleges etc. The experience that Honourable Patron in Chief and the Honourable Executive Chairman of NALSA will share with us will help us in moulding our future course of action in our endeavour to reach maximum beneficiaries for legal aid.

Friends, legal aid is meant to help the persons who are unable to bear the cost of legal services. What started as a mere legal aid has now grown into legal aid clinics, lok adalats, prison legal aid clinics, pension lok adalats, awareness programmes, propagating legal awareness through mobile vans etc. etc. We should not stop with the progress that we have made so far. We have to devise new ways to bring smile on the face of the unfortunate ones who do not know what their rights are and even if they know, how to enforce them.

Tamil Nadu is the pioneer in promoting Legal Aid programmes and Tamil Nadu Legal Aid & Advice Board was constituted in December 1976, a decade before the enactment of Legal Services Authorities Act. The Districts had District Committees in 1977 and the High Court Legal Aid Centre was constituted in July 1983. Today is a significant day for the Tamil Nadu Legal Services Authority since it was only on this day the erstwhile Tamil Nadu State Legal Aid and Advice Board had its first Executive Meeting at the Conference Hall of the Secretariat.

As a Patron in Chief of the Tamil Nadu State Legal Services Authority, it will not be out of place for me to mention some progress we have so far made. We are holding Legal Literacy and Awareness Campus in villages and have covered 18603 villages. Not satisfied with this, we have started second round to make the people know about their rights. Instead of conventional method of holding meetings for spreading legal awareness, we have resorted to some novel methods like playing folk songs the lyrics of which carry the message of various laws and enactments. We have engaged famous

contemporary playback singers. We are also releasing audio cassettes and booklets in vernacular so that the common man can be made aware of his rights. Apart from preparing a short film on 'Lok Adalat', we are also holding regular interaction with Media on legal awareness, and the Media is helpful in spreading the message to the people. A documentary on 'Access to Justice for all" was also prepared and distributed to the people.

Though the Governments have been generous, when it comes to funding legal aid programmes but they have their own limitations. The willing participation of stakeholders i.e. advocates, will vastly improve its functioning. I recently came across an article that the Orange County Bar Association in Orlando, Florida, requires all Bar Members to participate in its Legal Aid Society, by either serving in a pro bono capacity or donating a fee in lieu of service. The Bar Associations in this country may adopt such methods in the general interest so that it will supplement the Governments' efforts.

Thanks to various latest enactments and precedents and due to law's own nature of evolving every day, Courts are not out of bounds to the poor and also to laymen, who, though

financially sound, are not legal savvy. They are not up to date to the developments of law. They are often plagued by fear and ignorance and dumbstruck with awe on entering the court premises. They have to necessarily engage lawyers by paying their fees but the have-nots lack the wherewithal to pay the court fees. For a person who has no means of obtaining access to a court, justice becomes unequal.

If we have to make the provisions guaranteed by our Constitution and International Covenants to citizens, meaningful, we have to provide proper representation to the litigants who can't afford to engage a lawyer of their own. Every litigant must be made known of their rights and ways to assert them. I suggest that the State Legal Services Authorities should undertake field studies to be carried out by independent agencies to ascertain which mode of service delivery would best reach the beneficiaries. Private organisations often resort to this method to maximise their reach. We can also follow this corporate model to ensure that the time and money that we put on for providing legal aid will reach out to maximum number of beneficiaries.

I hope the experience of other States in implementing the legal aid programmes and the obstacles that they faced will help others in planning our programmes.

While wishing the Meet every success, I wind up my speech now thanking you all once again.

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