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**Full text of the speech delivered by**  
**Hon'ble CJI Shri Justice N V Ramana**  
**at the Valedictory Ceremony of**  
**the Pan-India Legal Awareness and Outreach Campaign**  
Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi  
14 November, 2021

1. I am very happy to meet all the Chief justices and brother judges from High Courts for the first time, physically, under one roof, on the occasion of the Valedictory Ceremony of the Pan India Legal Awareness and Outreach Campaign. Soon after I assumed office in April, I had the benefit of receiving valuable feedback from you all on a host of issues, during my online interaction. I take this opportunity today to share a few thoughts with you.
2. Together, we have been handling the responsibilities entrusted to us by the Constitution with utmost sincerity and commitment. The immense trust reposed by the public at large upon the judiciary, as a last resort of hope, stands testimony to this fact. The Supreme Court and the High Courts are hugely conscious of the Constitutional scheme, which is honored in letter and spirit by all of us.
3. Since our decisions have a huge social impact, they should be easily comprehensible and must be written in simple and clear language.
4. It is, primarily, the ability of Constitutional courts to function with absolute independence and necessary boldness in the face of adversity, that defines the character of our institution. Our ability to uphold the Constitution sustains our impeccable character. There is no other way to live up to the faith of our people.

*"Poverty is a misfortune for which the law cannot take any responsibility at all."*
5. In 1933, this was apparently the prevailing view in the British House of Lords. True to the above sentiment, nothing much was done by the ruling colonial power to alleviate the plight of the Indian masses. The fundamental mission behind the independence movement was to find a life of dignity and equality for all. The struggles and aspirations of our people shaped our Constitution, the document which promised us an egalitarian future.
6. Sadly, independent India inherited a deeply fragmented society from its colonial past. Considering the same, Pandit Nehru had once said, "*there could be no real freedom without economic freedom*" and that "*to call a starving man free, is but to mock him*".
7. The stark divide between haves and have nots is still a reality. No matter how many cherished declarations we successfully arrive at, in the face of poverty, inequity and deprivations, it will all seem pointless.

8. Despite our being a part of a welfare state, benefits are not trickling down to the intended beneficiaries at the desired levels. People's aspiration about leading a dignified life are often met with challenges. One of them, primarily, being poverty.
9. This is where initiatives like this intensive awareness campaign launched by NALSA on Gandhi Jayanti day assume great importance. The schemes and activities of NALSA act as a necessary bridge ensuring access between the benefactor and the beneficiary. The work we do at NALSA is essential for a healthy democracy. The endeavors that are initiated by NALSA are probably the only means to access justice for certain sections of our society.
10. Today we have gathered here to mark a momentous achievement. In 40 days we reached all corners of the country and made our presence felt.
11. Standing in the midst of all of you, I feel privileged to be a part of this institution which broke many barriers to fulfil the needs of the people. The history of this country is a witness as to how, the Constitutional courts, keeping the principles of a welfare constitution in their heart, have strived to stand up for the marginalised in this country.
12. Today, I can state that we all have sincerely worked to live up to the aspirations of the framers of our Constitution. The Indian judiciary has always remained in the forefront in shaping this welfare state. The decisions of the Constitutional courts of this country have enabled social democracy to thrive.
13. All the members of our judicial family, transform the social order and give justice - social, economic, political and cultural - in such a manner that the people secure what was promised in the glorious Preamble.
14. As the head of the family of State Judiciary, the Chief Justice and the Senior Judges must take care of all the judicial family members of the state. As judges if we have any problems, we cannot approach anyone else.
15. The head of the family must console, comfort and stand by all the judicial officers, other officers and staff members working in the system.
16. The mind of the Indian judiciary can be known to millions largely through the actions of the Trial Court and the District judiciary. For an overwhelming majority of litigants, what is real and existing is only the district judiciary. Without robust justice delivery system at the grassroot level, we cannot imagine a healthy judiciary. Therefore, nothing is more important than to preserve, protect and promote the independence and integrity of the judiciary at all levels.
17. Here, the role of High Courts assumes great importance, you are entrusted with the duty to supervise and oversee the functioning of

all the other courts in the State. Your actions and decisions will be reflected in their efficient functioning.

18. The Constitution bestowed greater responsibilities on the High Court. Not only it is a Constitutional Court but also is a fact finding court. Being concerned locally, High Courts are better placed to consider local peculiarities to render absolute justice.
19. The State judiciary, being closely associated with the people, has to be sensitive and aware about their problems and practical difficulties. In particular, it needs to be cognizant about both victims and as well as accused and must facilitate their emergency needs. After all, the law needs to operate humanely. Remember, it is the trial court which is approached first by a woman in distress, a child in need of care, or an illegal detainee.
20. As I have stated before, people who are suffering do not look for well-dressed, erudite lawyers or colossal court buildings. All they want, is to be relieved of their pain quickly, without exhausting all their resources.
21. We all have to work together to promote a sense of belonging with the justice delivery system, among the public. Therefore, especially in societies such as ours, an efficient legal aid service forms the backbone of a proficient justice delivery system, as it brings people closer to us.
22. Now, after this robust 40-day awareness campaign, we must be prepared for the next challenge. We all must get ready to manage the new justice seekers and their myriad needs.
23. Special emphasis must be placed in popularizing methods of alternate dispute resolution such as mediation and *lok adalats*. In the past few years, the legal services authorities across the country have done a stellar job by facilitating speedy dispensation of justice through the aforesaid mechanisms.
24. Secondly, at the grassroot level, we need staff and volunteers who are specially trained and sensitized to accommodate the needs and sensitivities of the victims and their families. Today, the birth anniversary of Pandit Nehru is being celebrated all over the country as Children's day. It is befitting that we are launching schemes primarily targeting children. To achieve the objective of such schemes, we must also consider maintaining staff who are trained in child-friendly legal aid or other specialized skills, such as psycho-social support.
25. It is imperative for us to diversify our workforce to include people from all sections, as we are striving to make our services accessible and inclusive by making it available in local languages.
26. Another focus area can be children who are dragged into the Criminal Justice system, especially those belonging to marginalized communities. This is where Restorative justice comes into play. Legal

Aid practitioners, especially, trained, empathetic individuals from local communities, can make a huge difference by joining the legal aid movement. As stakeholders in their communities, they are the best persons to guide children in a restorative path.

27. Moreover, the importance of law students in our legal aid movement cannot be understated. An active interest by the younger population in eradicating the existing social problems, will definitely pave the way for a brighter India. The State Legal Services Authorities must ensure larger participation of the students in the legal aid movement.
28. Lastly, the most important step which needs immediate assessment and addressing, is that of case and data management. This will not only add transparency but also streamline the justice delivery process and will aid the stakeholders to addressing the existing issues. We need to deploy modern technologies to meet these requirements.
29. We are blessed to have the patronage of Hon'ble the President of India Shri Ramnath Kovind ji. He was extremely to kind in launching this campaign on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2021. As the custodian of the Constitution, he has been constantly guiding us.
30. I offer my sincere thanks to Hon'ble the Prime Minister Shri Modi ji and the Government of India for extending all necessary help in giving boost to the legal aid movement in the country.
31. We must compliment Smt. Smriti Irani, Minister for Women and Child Development, for associating her Ministry with the Access to Justice Mission. This initiative should inspire other ministries to join hands with NALSA.
32. As far as our very own Law Minister is concerned, I am running out of compliments for this fine gentleman. I hope NALSA continues to benefit from his active association with this cause.
33. My brother Justice Lalit has emerged as a flagbearer of mission qualitative justice for all. His passion for advocating about the needs of the marginalized is admirable.
34. We are also privileged to have the company of brother Khanwilkar, under whose leadership the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee is extending help to the needy. With him at the helm of affairs, I am sure the committee will mark great achievements.
35. Today we are blessed to have a man of immense wisdom among us. Thank You Attorney General for gracing the occasion.

Thank You

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