

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE NEW BUILDING
OF THE JHARKHAND HIGH COURT**

Ranchi, May 24, 2023

I am delighted to be among you here today. I have an old association with the people of Jharkhand and I find their warmth amazing. I am grateful to you all for your warm welcome and for making me feel as if I am back at home once again.

Today, the Jharkhand High Court is crossing an important landmark with the inauguration of its new building. In its earlier stage, it was set up in 1972 as the Circuit Bench of the Patna High Court. This High Court was set up after the State of Jharkhand was carved out of the State of Bihar in November 2000. In barely two decades, it has grown impressively, and its sanctioned strength of judges has more than doubled from 12 to 25. The building from where it was functioning was once meant only for the Circuit Bench. Befitting its new profile, there was obviously the need for larger and more modern infrastructure to efficiently dispense justice.

The new building is truly impressive with its modern amenities and state-of-the-art physical infrastructure. It has a residential complex for the judges and the members of the registry, apart from lawyers' chambers and the State Bar Council Building. What is really notable is that the entire campus is designed and constructed by keeping the principle of energy conservation in mind. On top of it, the afforestation along with the presence of a variety of trees makes it truly a green campus. I am sure this new building of the Jharkhand High Court will inspire other public and private organisations to make the environment the central factor in their projects of similar nature. It is also a necessity in the age of global warming.

I congratulate everyone who has contributed to making this project a reality. I find the new campus visually pleasing as well. For those of you working here, it should be a pleasant experience to spend your working hours in this beautiful campus. In the context of working conditions, I would like to point out a trend we have witnessed in recent years. Many court buildings have opened crèches, so that our sisters can balance their family responsibilities with their work. I am sure the new building would have a provision for a crèche.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This court is a temple of justice. People of this nation look at courts with faith and even the language of law reflects that feeling, when we use words like 'pray'. People themselves have given courts the power to dispense justice, that is to say, to set wrongs right. They come here with a prayer to get what is just. It is a very serious responsibility indeed.

That brings us to a topic on which I have often spoken, namely, the question of access to justice. Improving it is always a work in progress. We must constantly endeavour to find new ways to continue that process.

Access has many aspects. Cost is among the most important of these. It has been observed that the expenses of litigation all too often put the quest of justice out of reach for many citizens. In response, various authorities have taken a number of welcome initiatives, including the opening of free legal counseling cells. Many lawyers too offer pro bono services. I urge all stakeholders to think innovatively and find new ways to expand the reach of justice.

Another aspect of access is language. As English has been the primary language of courts in India, a large section of the population is left out of the process. The language of justice should be inclusive, so that the parties to the particular case as well as interested citizens at large can become effective stakeholders in the system. The Supreme Court made a worthy beginning when it started making its judgments available in a number of Indian languages, and many other courts have also been doing so now. Needless to say, in a state like Jharkhand with rich linguistic variety, this factor becomes all the more relevant. I am sure the authorities are considering ways to make the court processes more accessible to people who are more comfortable with languages other than English.

In overcoming these and other hurdles before access to justice, in general, two factors are bound to be highly useful. One is technology, which is changing our world by the day. This new building has the latest technological facilities and that will prove highly helpful. The second factor is enthusiasm, especially of the younger generation in the field of law and justice. They are the ones who will come up with innovations that will improve access to justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Related to the access to justice is the question of undertrials. I spoke about it on the Constitution Day last year. I cannot help but talk about this matter close to my heart since I am addressing a distinguished gathering of judges, legal luminaries, members of the Bar and other dignitaries. One of the reasons behind the problem is that courts are

overburdened, which also hurts access to justice. I understand the problem is complex, yet the fact remains that a large number of people languish for years in prisons as undertrials. Prisons are overcrowded, making their life all the more difficult. We should address the root cause of the problem. When I say 'we', I include the whole society.

Still, it is good to see that the problem has been noticed widely, the issue is being debated, and some of the best minds of the legal fraternity are seized of the matter. I am glad to note that several steps have been taken to make justice delivery system more accessible and inclusive especially for women of different segments of the Indian society. I am confident that together we will soon be able to find a way out.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate the people of Jharkhand, judges and advocates as the High Court moves to this magnificent building which symbolises the beauty and power of justice. I am confident that this new building will bring with it a new energy and the judges, lawyers and administrative staff will perform their duties with greater dedication, commitment and efficiency. My best wishes will be with you in all your endeavours.

Thank you.

Jai Hind!