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**FULL TEXT OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY**

**HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA SHRI JUSTICE N V RAMANA**

**AT THE FELICITATION FUNCTION ORGANISED BY THE BAR COUNCIL OF INDIA**

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1. I am happy that we are meeting in person and exchanging good wishes after a long time. Considering the covid situation, though I had certain reservations, but ultimately I could not resist the request of the Bar Council. Bar Council and Bar Associations are my weakness. I have enjoyed my life as a member of the Bar more than as a Judge. Only a lawyer can have the freedom to speak his mind. A lawyer feels proud of representing a cause without any restrictions. A judge has onerous responsibility. Today, I feel that more than being felicitated, I being reminded of my responsibilities as the Chief Justice of India.
2. I have spoken enough in my earlier speeches about the legal profession and the role of the lawyers in shaping our societies. Undoubtedly, lawyers being the crusaders for rights, are an important wheel in the chariot of justice.
3. The Bar Council as a statutory body was visualised in 1960's and ever since then it has been functioning for promoting well-being and ethics within the profession. From regulating legal education to legal profession, from creating awareness about the law, to providing legal aid, the Bar Council of India truly is an institution of great social significance.
4. The Bar Council plays an indispensable role in formulating the legal landscape of the country. Recently, in spite of tremendous work pressure, I could not resist an invitation to chair the Advisory Board for the Development of Legal Education and Legal Profession organised by the Bar Council and I have already raised various concerns and have given my opinion regarding the growth and future of legal profession.
5. Law was often seen as a rich man's profession. Access to the profession was limited to the rich and privileged.
6. Slowly, the dynamics are changing within the profession. Due to change in social conditions, opportunities are opening up to all sections of the society, to be lawyers and judges.
7. But I feel, majority of aspirants from rural and vulnerable communities are not getting enrolled into the profession. Law still somehow remains an urban profession.
8. This is because there are several obstacles which a young advocate must overcome. The harsh reality is that, without any

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patronisation, in spite of several years of waiting and struggle, no one can guarantee stability in the profession.

9. Another area which needs to be highlighted is that majority of women advocates struggle within the profession. Very few women find representation at the top. Even when they do, they still continue to face significant challenges. After 75 years of independence, one would expect at least 50% representation for women at all levels, but I must admit, with great difficulty we have now achieved a mere 11% representation of women on the bench of the Supreme Court. Some States, because of reservation policy may reveal higher representation, but the reality remains that the legal profession still has to welcome women into its fold.
10. I want to highlight a new trend in the profession. This is similar to what has happened in foreign countries. I am referring to corporatisation of the profession. Because of issues relating to livelihood, many young and bright lawyers are joining law firms. This is a welcome change, as it is opening up fresh avenues for first generation lawyers. But at the same time, it is also causing a decline in the traditional practise. Common people cannot afford quality legal advice at corporate prices which is an area of concern.
11. Even though we are strongly providing access to justice, still lakhs of people in India are unable to approach the Courts to seek remedy. The high expenditure and the long delay which is a part of our legal process is the biggest challenge. Although this might not be the right occasion to mention, but as an experienced member of the judicial family, it is my duty to bring to your notice certain hard facts. The judicial system is facing difficult challenges like that of deficient infrastructure, shortage of administrative staff and huge vacancies of judges. I have been emphasising on augmenting the infrastructure for very long. I have a proposal to address this issue in a time bound manner. A comprehensive proposal for creation of National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation is under preparation. We have collected the status report from across the country. A proposal in this regard will reach the Hon'ble Law Minister very soon. I expect full cooperation from the Government.
12. It has been my endeavour to address the issue of vacancies in the higher judiciary on an urgent basis. A while ago, I was referred to as Sachin Tendulkar. I must correct the perception here. Like any game, it is a team effort. Unless all the members of the team perform well, it is difficult to win. Here, I must place

on record my sincere thanks to my colleagues in the Collegium - Brothers U U Lalit, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and L. Nageswara Rao - who have become active and constructive partners in this endeavour. Due to the collective efforts, as you are all aware, we could reduce the number of vacancies in the Apex Court to just one. Similarly, after I took over, the Collegium has recommended, if I am not wrong, 82 names to various High Courts. I hope the Government will ensure that the names are cleared at the earliest just the way the 9 names were cleared for the Apex Court. It is an ongoing process. We hope to live up to the herculean challenge of filling nearly 41% vacancies existing in all the High Courts.

13. Lawyers are born leaders. They are mentors, guides, friends and philosophers. They should always remain active members of society, and solve the problems faced by the people. Take any people's movements, lawyers have always been at the forefront.
14. A lawyer needs to be an all-rounder and a versatile personality. He must be well versed about social issues and various fields like economics, history, politics, literature and others. Here we must remember lawyers such as the legendary Mr. Nani Palkhivala, who despite never being an economist, used to address the public every year regarding the Budget.
15. That is why, society gives a lot of respect to lawyers. It is your duty to keep up the confidence reposed in you by the public.
16. I call upon all of you. Help the needy, women, farmers, workers and the disadvantaged to exercise their legal rights. Whenever it is possible, extend free legal aid and educate people about their rights.
17. I also want to use this platform to send a message to the young members of the Bar. Never forget the age old values of this noble profession. Seniority has immense value in this profession. Give due regards to your seniors at the Bar for their experience, knowledge and wisdom. Respect women colleagues and treat them with dignity. Respect the institution and the judges. You are the frontline of the legal system, and you must protect the institution from targeted, motivated and mala fide attacks. It is inherent to the Bar that it speaks up for what is fair and just.
18. Unfortunately, we lost many valuable members of the Bar this year. Covid has affected us physically and mentally. It has also affected the nature of the profession as a whole. Lawyers who cannot adapt to modern technology have been left behind. Covid has led to the exclusion of one generation of talented lawyers. This disparity is not good for the nation or the profession.

19. The Bar Council of India and the State Bar Associations have taken several steps to ameliorate the condition of lawyers during these difficult times. Immediately after taking over as the Chief Justice of India, I have written to the Hon'ble Minister in this regard, requesting the Government to take necessary steps to help those in crisis. With the young and dynamic Law Minister in office, we can expect positive measures at a rapid pace.
20. However, it is not enough. We must keep trying at our own levels to ease the difficulties.
21. I have taken note of the issues flagged by Mr. Manan Kumar Mishra. I will try to address the concerns, including that of need for creating a grievance redressal mechanism, in consultation with my colleagues on the Bench. I have already directed my Registrar to identify space for the office of BCI in the Supreme Court Complex.
22. As a well-wisher, I urge the members of the bar to never forget your commitment to the cause of justice and to never deny help to those in need. John W Davis who was the solicitor general of United States said and I quote,  
*"True, we [lawyers] build no bridges. We raise no towers. We construct no engines. But we smooth out difficulties; we relieve stress; we correct mistakes; we take up other men's burdens and by our efforts we make possible the peaceful life of men in a peaceful state"*
23. I expect the legal community to guide the nation to an ever-brighter future. Thank You all for organising this event. It is a humbling experience, I am grateful indeed.
24. I am very much impressed with the leadership qualities of Mr. Manan Kumar Mishra, Chairman, BCI. He and his colleagues in the Bar Council of India have always stood for the institution. Whenever there is a challenge before the institution, the Council stood by it. I am touched by the fact that the office bearers and members of various Bar Councils and Associations from across the country have travelled from far to be here today. I am fully conscious of the fact that this event is not to honour me as a person, it is your way of honouring the institution. We shall collectively strive to protect the dignity, integrity and reputation of the institution. Your kind words and garlands weigh heavily on me, literally. I must say, you turned this Saturday into a memorable day for me.
25. Best Wishes to you all.