

## **The Role of Media in Creating Awareness on Human Rights**

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*Speech by Justice C. K. Prasad,  
Chairman Press Council of India\**

Hon'ble Mr Justice H.L. Dattu, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, and former Chief Justice of India, distinguished members, noble man from the media, Civil Society, Awardees, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I deem it my privilege to join you all in commemorating the Silver Jubilee Year of the National Human Rights Commission of India, an institution committed to protect and uphold rights of all humans. Its efforts and contributions in educating people, spreading and enforcing human rights education throughout the Country is a matter of satisfaction for all of us.

When the Hon'ble Chairperson of the Commission Justice Dattu invited me for today's inaugural function, I accepted the same, as I was very eager to interact and meet the Human Rights experts and the young men and women committed to the cause of Human Rights.

Most Societies accept the philosophy of "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" Being respectful to others and treating them with dignity is the core of humanity. Therefore, every individual by virtue of his/her being is entitled to certain rights, popularly termed as 'Human Rights'. Treating everyone with reverence and respecting each other's choices are essential for healthy living. These finds mention in the Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran, and the Analects of Confucius, , are five of the oldest written sources that address the questions of people's duties, rights, and responsibilities. The equation between human rights and mass media is symbiotic. In India, the freedom of press flows from the rights to freedom of expression to citizens. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Media to ensure that everyone in the society enjoys the privilege of human rights. It is better if the duties, rights and responsibilities of human being form part of school curriculum as in my opinion unless a society is aware of what is happening to it and its members, the question of protecting or promoting the rights does not emerge. Hence, it is in fulfilling this function the existence of the media is essential.

In India, the press has played a critical role in educating and illuminating the masses about their rights that gave them the reason to stand against such violations. One cannot forget that the origin of press in India itself lay in challenging the denial of rights. Hicky's Bengal Gazette was published in 1780 to challenge the autocratic rule of the British East India Company. Even Social

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reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Dayanand Saraswati, made a massive use of mass media in the 19th century to create mass awareness and brought significant changes in the sphere of education and social legislation for the improvement of the position of the women in India. Another, significant contribution of mass media in social upliftment of women is education of girl child, – ‘*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*’ campaign is an ongoing movement ably performed by the media. The Gandhian era and post, independence period have brought about significant changes in the status and position of women and other vulnerable class in India, which would not have happened without the use of mass media.

With time, the contribution of mass media has not only been restricted to changing the mindset and the entrenched attitude of the people towards women but also towards other disadvantaged groups in the society, such as, persons with disabilities, transgender, elderly people, the refugees, etc. It has acted strongly in shaping the ideas, public opinion and as an instrument of social change in eradication of social disabilities like illiteracy, pardah, child marriage, child labour, female infanticides, human scavenging and many more. It has also played an active role in reporting and covering the sufferings and agonies of the natives of the conflict, affected areas, flooded and famine affected regions, the plights of the farmers on loss of their cultivation, each time media has made an active and immediate effort by highlighting those giving rise to financial and other possible relief to reach the afflicted population. It has acted diligently in bridging the gap between the citizens and the Government by helping them to reach one another in time of need. Mass media, coupled with the agencies and organizations working in the areas of human rights, have facilitated the implementation of human rights in India.

Ladies and Gentlemen, media is the eyes and ears of any democratic society and its existence is vital to the smooth functioning of democracy. It guards the public interest and acts as voice of the voiceless. Media mostly has helped propagate an informed opinion about human rights. In order to perform its role in creating mass awareness on human rights, media personnel themselves also need to be fully conversant with the various aspects of human rights issues. It is important that the media people arm themselves with the necessary information and then present the facts and analysis in public. It could be best expected from the media is to make every citizen aware and conscious about their rights, which in turn will enable public to recognize violation of human rights, when they come across any such incidence in daily life.

Many of you are public communicators and wear hats of an activist and journalists together. What are Human Rights, perhaps many of us know, but what we do not know many times is its violation. It is Media which not only

create awareness about Human rights but brings it to the forefront in case of its violation. Communication is complete and useful only when a communicator is able to convey the intended message to its receiver in a way that he fully understands and identifies the message delivered and find itself emotionally involved and then responds appropriately. In other words, when the communicator can strike a deep impact on the minds of its receivers, only then, an effective communication takes place. In case of violation of human rights these qualities are needed by the media more. Human rights can be meaningful so long as the remedies are provided when someone is wronged. The poor labourers, the marginal farmers, and deprived sections of the societies are the most vulnerable class, whose Human Rights are violated day in and out, not necessarily by the State but by fellow human being. It the media who defends their rights by bringing the violation in public domain. The flagrant violation of the Human Rights of young women and children at the Shelter Homes at Muzzafarpur and Deoria (U.P.) would not have come to the notice of the country, had the mass media not written about it.

With the advent of technology in the world of mass communication, media has become more powerful than ever and rightly claimed to be the fourth estate of the democracy. With this massive power and infrastructure to reach people within seconds, its responsibilities and duties towards the society have also augmented. Few basic tenets that media needs to abide by in narrating any incidence in public would be, to tell the truth not hide, no half, baked news and do not be the mouthpiece of any interest group or individuals and most importantly do your bit in creating an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Not to mention that if this power not used judiciously may result in a massive violation of human rights too. Such cases have happened in past, the sensational and provocative headlines and the graphic representations of the violence during the communal carnage have aggravated the tensions between the religious communities instead of mitigating it. Several times, militant groups have also misused media to propagate their unlawful agendas in public, one such incidence took place when the Taliban in Afghanistan went to the extent of burning the dead bodies and mutilate them in order to get better coverage. Hence, while operating, such a powerful machinery of mass communication, the journalists and the editors being its gatekeepers need to act cautiously, sensibly and report an issue with sheer objectivity without jumping to a premature conclusion.

One significant violation, which has gone unnoticed in this country, is the violation of human rights of members of mass media itself. Do you know how they maintain themselves and their family? The provisions of the Working Journalist Act is followed more in breach than obedience and therefore, it is also important to remind ourselves that even the media personnel are human

beings too; hence, protecting, safeguarding and revering their human rights are equally important.

With this, I conclude by quoting John F. Kennedy who once said that "*The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.*" Media being the mediator and leader of the people in championing the cause of human rights, its workforce, the journalists are the focal point. Are they adequately armoured with the tools and devices to guard themselves against the vested groups or act fearlessly even in a life, threatening situation? if not that directly jeopardizes their basic right to life. It is time that we need to consider this too.

Thank you.

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