

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA  
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AT VALEDICTORY FUNCTION OF CLEA-COMMONWEALTH  
ATTORNEY GENERALS AND SOLICITOR GENERALS  
CONFERENCE**

**New Delhi, February 4, 2024**

I am glad to be here in the august gathering of Attorneys and Solicitors Generals, other members of the legal and judicial community and legal scholars from the Commonwealth nations.

Many of you have come from far, and all of you have given two days for brainstorming over a matter of critical significance, namely, cross-border challenges in justice delivery. I hope you have had memorable formal and informal discussions and fruitful sharing of ideas and experiences during the conference.

I see before me some of the best minds of the legal fraternity from around the world. While you have deliberated on various topics on the agenda in precise specifics and great detail, I can only offer a general and generic overview that may complement your ground level understanding of the situation.

Let me ask the basic question: What does 'justice' mean? The great Indian knowledge tradition offers a range of answers. The Sanskrit term closest to 'justice' is 'nyaya', which means both what is just and what is right. 'Nyaya' is also the name of one of the six systems of classical Indian philosophy, which is essentially similar to the study of logic in the West.

So, what is right and just is also logically sound. These three qualities combine to define the moral order of a society. That is why you, the representatives of the legal profession and the judiciary, are the ones who help in upholding the order. If that order is challenged, you are

the ones who, as lawyers or judges, law students or teachers, strive most to set it right again.

As many of the educators and students in the field of law here know, 'nyaya' was one of the fundamental elements of education in ancient India. This age-old conception of justice continued to be reflected in the justice delivery system at the village level in India, till the advent of modernity.

In modern times, two or three generations of exceptional leaders helped revive a new national awareness. What was very noticeable then was that a majority of them had studied law – and that too in England. I am sure many of the other Commonwealth members had leaders in those days with this background. This legacy is what binds us together as a family. The obvious reason for this common pattern is that any effort towards the foundation of a modern nation has to begin with a common understanding of justice.

This process, in formal terms, leads to the writing of the Constitution. India was blessed to have Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as the head of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. He expanded the notion of 'justice'. His conception of 'justice' is, I believe, relevant not only in India but in all parts of the globe. The Preamble to our Constitution speaks of "Justice, social, economic and political". Therefore, when we speak of 'justice delivery', we should keep in mind all aspects of it, including social justice.

In recent times, as the world faces the threat of climate change, we should also add environmental justice to these varied aspects of the concept of justice. As it happens, the issues of environmental justice often pose cross-border challenges. They form the key area of what this conference is about, namely, 'Cross-Border Challenges in Justice Delivery'.

Dear Friends,

Our environment is only the most obvious way in which we all are inter-connected. Globalisation of trade and commerce is another

example of this inter-connection. Moreover, in recent decades, technology has brought us closer to one another. When we explore the complex cross-border legal challenges, we need to keep two things in mind. Firstly, humankind has a long and rich history of inter-connection and inter-dependence. Secondly, the technological revolution has once again highlighted exactly that inter-connectedness. This often leads to challenging situations in law, but we should always be guided by what is common to us all – humanity and humanitarian values.

I am glad that the Commonwealth Legal Education Association has taken this responsibility to chart a roadmap to a common future that transcends borders and underlines the fundamental principles of natural justice based on equality and dignity. I believe this an ideal forum for the necessary collaboration. The Commonwealth, with its diversity and legacy, can show the rest of the world the way to address the common concerns in a spirit of cooperation.

India, as many observers abroad have also noted, has emerged as a key stakeholder in the global discourse. I am confident that India has much to offer when it comes to international issues in justice delivery. India is not only the biggest democracy, but history shows that it is also the oldest democracy. With that rich and long democratic heritage, we can offer our learning in justice delivery in modern times.

Dear Friends,

As I was going through the agenda for this conference, I was glad to see that a careful selection was made for sub-themes, including a subject close to my heart: 'Access to Justice: Bridging the Divide'. I will be glad to see the Commonwealth nations exchanging their experiences and lessons in this domain.

The discussions in the conference must have been enriched by the participation of deans and vice-chancellors as well as senior students and scholars of various institutions and universities. Young minds are flexible and can offer innovative and out-of-the-box solutions to the problems that have challenged the most experienced professionals.

Young people are also most at ease with new technologies that can offer new solutions too.

Among the sub-themes, I was happy to note “Ethics and Accountability in Legal Practice”. I could not help but recall an incident from the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Incidentally, it was his study of law in London that changed his destiny and also the destiny of countless others. He had gone to South Africa to assist in a legal dispute and eventually found a way to bring the two parties to an agreement. They both welcomed his solution happily. In his autobiography, Gandhiji writes, [Quote] My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder. The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby—not even money, certainly not my soul. [Unquote]

Amid the endless complexities of laws and statutes, let us never forget the simple and basic goal before us, which is, to find out the better side of human nature.

Dear Friends,

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all participants who gave their time for this event, shared their wisdom and enriched the discourse. I also congratulate the organisers of the conference for creating a platform that can be a template to launch similar initiatives on matters of common concern in the legal and judicial domains. To all of you, I offer my best wishes.

Thank you.  
Jai Hind!  
Jai Bharat!