

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE  
AT THE FIRST CONVOCATION OF THE NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY**

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi: 15-06-2013

1. I am happy to be here to participate in the first convocation of the National Law University Delhi (NLUD).
2. I understand that the vision of the University is to become a global legal institution which will compete with the best within and outside India and prepare lawyers for a career that introduces them to wide range of opportunities in the legal profession. The NLUD seeks to create lawyers who are professionally competent, technically sound and socially relevant. They will not only enter the Bar and the Bench but will also be equipped to address the imperatives of the new millennium and uphold the Constitution of India.
3. The location of NLUD in the capital city provides students with an opportunity to observe and participate in the legal and political process of our country. Legal education has undergone a paradigm shift in the last two decades. NLUD must bridge the gap between the theoretical concepts and practical application. It must ignite inquiry and encourage curiosity.
4. I am happy to see that the students and faculty have been using the opportunities offered by this University well. They have started legal aid projects, are providing academic inputs for policy-making and helping with public interest litigation.

5. Ladies and Gentlemen, lawyers play an important role in enabling the public access to justice and ensuring that our Constitution becomes a living reality. The legal profession is regarded a noble profession in every society where the rule of law prevails. In India, a large number of our national leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru were lawyers. In fact, it can be argued that training as lawyers and the exposure our leaders received to legal systems in India and abroad played a major role in the evolution of our unique national movement. Our freedom struggle sought to wrest from the British colonial masters freedom, basic rights and democracy in a peaceful and non-violent manner using reason, argument, and moral courage all of which are important tools of a good lawyer.
  
6. I would like to request the student community of NLUD to always keep in mind the fact that this wonderful education you have received is a contribution of the state and the community. The land on which your university stands has been provided by community. Similarly, these buildings, the books that fill your library, the online databases etc. come from money that the state has invested in you. The nation invests in its universities because students are our future. Students, in turn, have an important responsibility, not just to themselves and their families but also to this country, its legal system and its people.

7. Graduates from this prestigious university must constantly look for ways in which you can give back to your country. You must be ready and willing at all times to represent the powerless and help them obtain justice. We need an army of smart, committed and idealistic people to give voice to the voiceless and produce tangible change in our society. I hope all of you gathered here will take up legal aid for the poor as a life long commitment and do your utmost to draw attention to the problems of the disempowered. However, do not do this demanding or expecting gratitude. Do it as your duty – your contribution to a more equal world and a motherland you are proud of - an India which has made you what you are today.
8. Many of us often ask of others what we are unwilling to do ourselves. People furious about corruption still remain willing to bribe to expedite their own work. While demanding strict laws against sexual violence and gender discrimination publicly, there are those who continue to perpetuate the same gender discrimination. Some get angry when seniors treat juniors with discourtesy. But sometimes they themselves are inconsiderate to those who work under them. “Be the change you want to see in the world”, is wisdom that came from the father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi and I appeal to you to assimilate this principle into your daily life.
9. I had to walk three miles and wade through a stream to go to school. There are many in our country who continue to do so even now. In the larger scheme of things, their struggle

should be your struggle. Their welfare and happiness provides strength to our democracy and community. Therefore, be the person who puts in the effort to bring about change and not the one who complains and waits for others to act. Change is never easy. It takes patience, faith and hard work. But, what is important is not to give up. India has changed more in the last six decades than in the previous six centuries. I am confident it will change even more in the next ten years than in the previous sixty. This is India's enduring vitality at work.

10. India has one of the best constitutions in the world. Its driving principle was a compact between state and citizen, a powerful public-private partnership nourished by justice, liberty and equality. The Constitution represented a second liberation, this time from the stranglehold of traditional inequity in gender, caste, community along with other fetters that had chained us for too long.
11. Study the Constitution well. Understand our political system, its institutions and processes. Analyse the choices that were made to build the country into what it is today. Recognize that intelligent choices will need to be made for enabling this country reach her maximum potential. Participate in making these choices.
12. You are amongst the brightest young minds in this country. Help policy makers make the right policies. Do not walk away from issues of national importance. Be willing to read,

learn and formulate views on national issues. A democracy cannot be healthy without informed participation. Inform yourself and inform others. Make the governance of this country your passion. Choose to engage with our beautiful, complex, often difficult and sometimes noisy democracy – help strengthen and refine our legal and political institutions. Pass on what you have learned here, and help others understand their rights as well as responsibilities. Help the nation create better citizens who are able to access all the opportunities that our country offers.

13. Lawyers are given a special status in this country because society recognizes the special functions that they perform. Lawyers have a duty to fight injustice wherever it exists. It is lawyers who must lead the change against criminality, poverty, domestic violence, caste-discrimination and other forms of exploitation. Victims of such exploitation often do not have the strength or skills to fight it on their own.
14. If you are asked to pay a bribe, have the courage to refuse. If you are asked to support violence, corruption or oppression, have the courage to say no. If you fear reprisal, remember that breaking an unjust system is about making difficult choices. It is about enough people daring to make difficult choices and this should begin with you. Take your duties as a citizen seriously. As lawyers, you should drive the fulfilment of democratic values and as a group must campaign for positive change in society. Even as you represent your clients in their individual matters, you must

always strive to preserve the rule of law. Be the guardians of the fundamental rights of our citizens.

15. Recent incidents of brutal assault and child rape in Delhi have shaken our society's collective conscience. They highlight the urgency with which we need to introspect at the erosion of values and our repeated failure to ensure safety and security of our women and children. There is need for us in India to reset our moral compass. We must collectively ensure the dignity and respect for women at all times. The legal fraternity, especially students of law, must be in the vanguard of the battle for women's security, rights and welfare. Universities like NLU must take the lead in meeting contemporary moral challenges and ensuring that nine essential civilizational values of love for motherland; performance of duty; compassion for all; tolerance for pluralism; respect for women; honesty in life; self-restraint in conduct, responsibility in action and discipline are fully entrenched in the young minds.
16. On this occasion of the first convocation of National Law University, Delhi, I congratulate every one receiving degrees today and call upon all of you to lead the way in the socio-economic transformation of our great nation. Let us together make "Justice, social, economic and political" a living reality for every citizen of our country.

Thank you. Jai Hind.