

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL  
AWARDS FOR THE YEAR 2013 FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi: 03-12-2013

I am indeed very happy to be amidst you this evening on the occasion of presentation of the National Awards for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Today, we honor achievers among differently-abled individuals who have overcome enormous odds with their remarkable courage and indomitable spirit. Awards have also been given to the Institutions which have made outstanding contribution to the empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Their work is noble and exemplary as it seeks the inclusion of differently abled persons into the mainstream of society.

**2.** This important day gives us an opportunity to reflect on our collective endeavours to create an inclusive society in which all members, including the differently abled, enjoy equal opportunities and have the right to realize their full developmental potentiality.

**3.** Persons with Disabilities face several barriers as a result of which they are unable to have equal access to various services in society including education, employment, health care, transportation and at times, justice. However, it is seen that when Persons with Disabilities are empowered to participate fully in societal life on an equal basis with others, the nation and society as a whole are benefitted. Therefore, the barriers faced by Persons with Disabilities which are detrimental to societal growth need to be removed. With a positive and humane attitude, the society, NGOs and individuals should extend support and guidance to the differently-abled and their families to ensure their socio-psychological and emotional integration into the mainstream of society. Education and awareness can correct negative perceptions. Reasonable opportunities should be provided to Persons with Disabilities in order to achieve progress and development for all.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

4. The Indian Constitution stipulates the State to ensure equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals which implies an inclusive society for all, including the Persons with Disabilities. We are committed to the full empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Thus, India signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We need to move forward on this agenda to provide Persons with Disabilities with an environment conducive for their full development and ensure their equal participation in the development of our nation.

5. India is also engaged in global efforts to seek equal opportunities for the disabled. Recently, in September, 2013, the United Nations General Assembly convened a high-level meeting of nations to highlight the close linkage between development and disability. Since, it was felt that the development of a nation is not possible if the needs and capacities of persons with disabilities are not recognized, all nations resolved to seriously consider disability concerns in all their developmental activities. This is a remarkable step taken internationally for improving the quality of lives of Persons with Disabilities. India has fully endorsed this stand.

6. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995, contains certain important rights and entitlements for Persons with Disabilities. The Government is at an advanced stage of bringing in a new and comprehensive law in consonance with the provisions of the UN Convention. I understand that this is a holistic piece of legislation which would entail major responsibilities not merely on the Union Government, but also on State Governments, local bodies, and even private service providers.

7. I am happy to note that the Central Government, after setting up the new Department of Disability Affairs last year, has taken a number of initiatives to sensitize various stakeholders to the needs of Persons with Disabilities. Greater convergence in the activities of the various Union and State Ministries and Departments such as those of Social Justice & Empowerment, Women and Child Development, Human Resource Development, Health and Family Welfare and Labour & Employment is required for achieving better results.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**8.** A multi-faceted approach and a multiple collaborative effort can help Persons with Disabilities to realize their full individual potential and make them active participants in the development process. The mainstreaming of the concerns of the differently-abled is necessary to ensure their participation and involvement in the many spheres and activities of the society. Besides a strong policy framework, we must have an efficient and effective delivery mechanism in place to ensure that desired benefits can reach Persons with Disabilities. The Central and State Governments must effectively partner with the private sector and civil society in their endeavour to create an inclusive society.

**9.** Specific schemes, programmes and facilities must be formulated particularly for the empowerment of children, women and senior citizens with disabilities as they need special consideration. This is necessary in order to bring them into the mainstream of society and improve the quality of their lives. Education can equip the differently-abled to be strong enough to face the world. Children with disabilities should get adequate opportunities to pursue their education which can enable them to get gainful employment in future for leading a life of dignity and respect. It should be ensured that children with special needs get access to education at par with others. We have to provide the right kind of teaching-learning environment, material in accessible format and barrier-free educational institutions. It is imperative to have websites in accessible format for reaching information to the differently-abled. Ensuring the provision of accessible information and disabled friendly technology will enhance the opportunities for progress of persons with disabilities. Special training of teachers in adequate numbers is essential so that they can understand the needs of children with disabilities and thereby teach and guide them effectively.

**10.** Various appropriate and affordable assistive devices are needed to enable Persons with Disabilities to substantially improve their functional capacity and lead an independent life. Efforts should be made to provide innovative user friendly aids, assistive devices as also computer software and accessories to all Persons with Disabilities at a reasonable and

affordable cost, so that they have equal opportunities for enhancement and actualization of their inherent potential.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**11.** Economic empowerment of Persons with Disabilities is the key to their well-being and can enable them to lead a life of dignity. We have provisions for reservation in employment in establishments in the Government Sector for Persons with Disabilities. However, concerted efforts are required to fill up the backlog of the reserved vacancies. The Government as well as public and private sectors should work hand in hand to improve the skill-levels of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to enhance their employability. The private sector is also a large employer and can play a commendable role in providing opportunities to differently abled persons to prove their capabilities. The private sector should come forward to meet their social responsibility obligations and take pro-active steps to provide placements for Persons with Disabilities in their establishments and industries.

**12.** Disability, in a large number of cases, is preventable. Greater awareness and a pro-active approach are required in this regard. Preventive measures like early detection and timely intervention can reduce the incidence of disabilities particularly in children in the 0 to 6 age group. Measures such as immunization at the right age, disease prevention, improvement of hygiene, better nutrition, better access to healthcare, maternal and neonatal care need to be taken in right earnest. ASHA, Anganwadi workers and other field level workers should be specially sensitized and trained to identify children with disabilities to facilitate an early intervention.

**13.** I congratulate all the award winners and convey my best wishes to them for their future. I hope they will inspire many others to come forward to work with dedication and commitment to make our society more disabled-friendly and inclusive. Let us all, on this occasion, pledge to work towards the empowerment and inclusion of all in our society.

***JAI HIND***