

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL  
AWARDS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES FOR THE YEAR 2014**

**New Delhi: 03-12-2014**

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be present amidst you on the occasion of presentation of the National Awards for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Today, is a significant day in the sense that on this day the United Nations General Assembly, by a Resolution in 1992, had proclaimed the observance of this day as the International Day of Disabled Persons. The main objective of this initiative was to promote a worldwide understanding of the issues connected with disability and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of disabled persons. It was felt that such worldwide focus would encourage proactive efforts of the international community for the integration of the disabled in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. It is entirely appropriate that the people of India should mark this date by honouring the selfless individuals among us and the altruistic organisations in our country who have generously worked for the empowerment of the disabled in our society. Today we recognize them for their contribution, and the time, resources and energies that they have dedicated to bring positive change in the lives of the

differently abled persons. I congratulate them and deeply appreciate their humanity.

2. Ladies and gentlemen, it is important to acknowledge that although we, as a people, have been conditioned by our religion and values to be especially mindful and sensitive to the needs of the differently abled, and although our Government has taken a number of measures to systematically address the challenges that they face, we still have a lot to do to facilitate them in their daily lives.

3. Our Constitution, no doubt, guarantees the equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals, including Persons with Disabilities. Our main law, "*The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act*" of 1995, provides very specific entitlements to Persons with Disabilities. Government of India has introduced a Bill for *Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Parliament*. However, besides refining our policy framework, it is

essential for us to reinforce our efforts to put better delivery mechanisms in place.

4. In this context, one of the key instruments is education. Children with disabilities should have access, from the very beginning of their school lives, to the best possible educational opportunities that will enable them to cope with their disability and overcome any lack of confidence. Government has taken the necessary steps by providing scholarships for students, creating effective teaching-learning conditions, providing material in appropriate format and facilitating the access of the disabled to educational technology and equipment that is updated and appropriate. I would emphasize that special training of teachers is essential to enable them to be tuned to the needs of children with disabilities and guide them effectively.

5. Government is also paying due attention to designing public facilities and services to make them “disabled friendly”. I am glad that Government of India has recently revised its scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase and Fitting of Aids and Appliances. The new scheme includes more devices that can be provided to students and other categories of persons with disabilities.

6. I would also like to underline the significance of economic empowerment of the differently abled. Government has reserved

positions for them and the private sector has launched similar initiatives. Both the public and private sectors should be partners in improving the skills of persons with disabilities and enhancing their employability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. Many differently abled children are deprived from participating in games and activities that other children consider an integral and enjoyable part of their childhood. Women with disabilities feel particularly disadvantaged. Elderly disabled persons, in the twilight of their lives, are the most vulnerable. We need to involve people like these in more social and cultural activities where they can participate as per their 'different' abilities.

8. The value of early detection and effective intervention cannot be emphasised enough. A number of simple precautionary steps can mitigate the effect of illnesses and chronic conditions that create disabilities - particularly in children in the susceptible age groups. Immunization, disease prevention, better hygiene, sanitation and nutrition, and access to healthcare and comprehensive maternal and neonatal care are the areas where we should apply ourselves with vigour.

9. I would also highlight the useful role that the media can play - of focusing attention on the challenges and issues confronting the disabled and reminding the public of their duty to them.

10. Ladies and Gentlemen, many among us must be wondering what they can do to make a difference : to them I would quote the words of Swami Vivekananda who said, "*Arise, awake, sleep no more; within each of you there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe this, and that power will be manifested*". I would remind each one of you to recognise that there is a great potential within each differently abled man, woman or child. It is our duty, as a progressive society, to empower them to fully realize it.

11. As I leave this thought with you, I once again congratulate all the National Award winners and convey to them my best wishes for the success of their endeavours. I am confident that they will continue to lead and inspire us, by their example, to work for a better life and future for the differently abled.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!