

News

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Justice Vikram Nath, who is the Supreme Court judge and head of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), said on Wednesday, ***"Making sure that society uses an inclusive approach to meet the needs of people with disabilities is not an act of charity but a matter of justice."***

Justice Nath spoke at a NALSA-organized webinar today for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

His keynote speech brought the discussion back to the issues faced by people with disabilities. Justice Nath stressed that the need for inclusion is based on the need to make sure everyone is treated equally.

Justice Nath said, "Inclusion is not an act of charity; it is an act of affirmation of equal personhood."

He said that inclusion means making new, better places where everyone can take part fully and in a way that is meaningful.

He went on, ***"When we take the barriers away, we do more than make it easier for people to access things; we unleash the power of humanity."***

Justice Nath remembered that Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, India's former president, one time shared a poem written by Mustafa, a boy who had lost his legs and had prosthetic limbs.

Mustafa's poem "**Courage**" says

"I don't have legs. My mind says: Don't weep, don't weep

For I need not bow even in front of a King."

Justice Nath observed that these displays of positivity and dignity represent the mindset that countries ought to adopt when it comes to disability inclusion, with the aim of turning obstacles into assets.

He also underlined the necessity for legal aid services to reach individuals who cannot access the system. He advocated for regular visits by District Legal Services Authorities to hospitals, mental health facilities, special schools and community centres.

He stated that training for judges, attorneys, police officers, and court workers should include disability sensitisation, ideally in conjunction with organizations that support people with disabilities.

Justice Nath urged legal services institutions to assist individuals in accessing schemes such as the Unique Disability ID, Assistance to Disabled Persons (ADIP) and the Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS).

He further called for legal information to be provided in formats including braille, audio, large-print and accessible digital versions, to ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The event opened with an address by NALSA Member Secretary Sanjiv Pandey.

Two technical discussions were conducted during the webinar. The sessions took the audience through how the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is being put into practice, and NALSA's 2024 scheme for persons with mental illness and intellectual disabilities. Speakers also broke down accessibility issues within legal processes.

A former State Disability Commissioner walked the participants through key Central and State welfare schemes and pointed to the need for policy coherence.

The open-house that followed brought State and District Legal Services Authorities, para-legal volunteers, panel lawyers and academics into a shared forum. They exchanged on-ground experiences and raised questions on reasonable accommodation, coordination with disability authorities and digital accessibility.

In the concluding presentation, NALSA Director Kunal Vepa thanked the participants and highlighted the institution's sustained commitment on disability-inclusive legal aid and barrier-free justice delivery