

**Opening Remarks during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of India in the 41st session of the UPR Working Group (7-18 November 2022) delivered by H.E. Mr. Tushar Mehta, Learned Solicitor General of India, Head of the Delegation**

**[Geneva, 10th November 2022]**

**Mr. President,**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Members of the Troika,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**Namaskar, and**

**A very good afternoon to all of you.**

1. It gives me great pleasure to address you on the occasion of India’s fourth Universal Periodic Review.
2. We have been looking forward to our 4th Review. We attach a lot of importance to the UPR mechanism, which, in the course of its four cycles, has emerged as a unique peer review process to realise the goal of global promotion and protection of human rights. India’s National Report for the 4th cycle captures the progress made in the field of Human Rights over the last 4 ½ years.
3. This year marks the 75th Anniversary of India’s independence. When India gained independence, there were widespread doubts on whether India can survive as a nation and as a democracy. During this period, we have made significant progress in realizing the goals of growth and development of India and ensuring enjoyment of basic human rights by our people. Despite the challenges, India has been successful in establishing a vibrant, inclusive and democratic polity and taking democracy to grassroots, which have been vital and enabling factors in enjoyment of human rights by our people.

**Mr. President,**

1. India has a robust constitutional and legislative framework for promotion and protection of human rights. The Constitution of India guarantees civil and political rights, and provides for progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. We have also enacted laws and framed regulations in order to address gaps in the legal framework to meet our human rights obligations. Our institutional framework also includes constitutional bodies, such as the National Human Rights Commission, and separate National Commissions for Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Our laws continue to evolve to meet the requirements and challenges of our society. Our Constitution has undergone 103 amendments so far. We have presently undertaken a comprehensive review of existing laws & legislations including repealing of obsolete colonial era legislations. Over 1400 laws have been repealed so far as a part of this process.
2. Our independent, proactive and progressive judiciary has played a key role in ensuring implementation of our human rights commitments. Indian Courts have relied on international human rights instruments for progressively interpreting the existing laws of India. In fact, judicial interpretation of the constitutional and legislative texts have contributed significantly to the protection of the human rights. The Supreme Court of India in a landmark judgment has held that ‘any international convention consistent with fundamental rights and in harmony with their spirit must be read into these provisions to enlarge the meaning and content thereof, to promote the object of constitutional guarantees.’
3. Our vibrant media and proactive civil society have been vital in drawing attention to the instances of violations of human rights of the people.

**Mr. President,**

1. India with 1.3 billion nationals, is home to one-sixth of humanity and is an incredibly diverse country. Despite its several achievements, India remains a country with many developmental challenges simultaneously negotiating social, cultural, religious, political and economic transformations.
2. Realising inclusive and sustainable development in line with Agenda 2030 is a high priority for the Government. We remain convinced that inclusive and equitable development is the key to securing a life of dignity, security, empowerment and freedom for all.
3. But, the last two years of the Covid-19 Pandemic have been particularly challenging. Our commitment to promotion and protection of basic human rights has been at the centre of our strategy to deal with COVID-19 pandemic. We achieved that by giving direct and free food support to 800 million persons, this for over two years, under Prime Minister’s scheme for welfare of Poor*;* and financial support to more than 445 million citizens, especially to the vulnerable sections. *Prime Minister’s Cares for children* is a special initiative to support the education and living expenses of children who lost both parents, till they attain 23 years of age. In addition, India also supplied over 270 million vaccine doses to around 100 countries during the Pandemic, including the United Nations blue helmets.
4. India is pioneering in the use of Public Digital Infrastructure for good Governance and realization of Sustainable Development Goals. This involves building innovative governance systems and efficient citizen-oriented services by leveraging the digital technologies. Public service delivery has been scaled up through the use of biometric identity assigned to every resident and aligned with the financial inclusion programme of the government called ‘*Jan Dhan Yojana*’ for bringing affordable access to financial services. With 1.16 billion telecom subscribers, 1.3 billion unique digital biometric identities and more than 460 million newly opened bank accounts, India has transferred social benefits of more than US$ 300 billion digitally and coordinated more than 2 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses. The scheme of the Government of India called *Ayushman Bharat,* the world’s largest health insurance scheme, benefits around 500 million poor persons by free treatment of upto half a million Indian rupees.
5. In order to grant equality and empowerment of women, the Government has enacted legislation on triple *Talaq* declaring the instant divorce granted by pronouncement of *talaq* three times as void and illegal. Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2013 has expanded the definitions of rape, sexual violence and trafficking with stricter punishments.
6. To safeguard the rights and welfare of workers, the Government has enacted four Labor Codes that harmonize needs of workers and the industry covering over 500 million workers from the organized and unorganized sectors and the self-employed and seek to ensure minimum wages, social security as well as pay parity for women workers.

**Mr. President,**

1. Preservation and protection of the environment has been a central pillar of India’s civilisation and culture. The Supreme Court of India has recognized the right to clean environment as a part of individual’s right to life guaranteed by the Constitution of India.
2. India has also been at the forefront of global action against climate change. Apart from meeting its commitments under the Paris Agreement through ambitious domestic actions, India has also launched three global initiatives for promoting climate action. The first is the International Solar Alliance that promotes greater use of solar energy and has been supported by 110 members. The second is the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) that supports development, sustainable, and inclusive infrastructure. And, last month, the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modiji launched the Mission LiFE (i.e. Lifestyle for the Environment) with the United Nations Secretary General which encourages individuals to change lifestyles to protect the environment.

**Mr. President,**

1. Broken and emaciated by colonialism, India in 1947 was an unprecedented political startup, aggregating over 550 principalities, burdened with a divided society and economically anemic. Today, we are the world’s third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity and a standard bearer of democracy and diversity.
2. India’s contribution to global human rights discourse since its independence is very well known. India’s civilizational ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam means “the World is a family” and Sarvodaya, which means “Welfare of all” have inspired it to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights globally.
3. India has been playing a leading role in global action against contemporary challenges of terrorism, pandemics, climate change, radicalization and violent extremism, sustainable development, which all impact on enjoyment of human rights of people. India’s developmental partnerships with global south contribute to enjoyment of human rights in partner countries.

**Mr. President,**

1. I now invite the representatives of various Ministries of India to outline the specific steps taken by India forward towards fulfilling its obligations in various domains of human rights. First, I invite the Vice Chancellor of the National Law University to speak on the preparation of the National Report. Thereafter the representatives of the Ministries of Home Affairs, Women and Child Development, Minority Affairs, Social Justice & Empowerment, Rural Development, and the National Institution for Transforming India, will take the floor.

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