

**VALEDICTORY ADDRESS
BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE INTERNATIONAL JUDICIAL CONFERENCE**

New Delhi, February 23, 2020

1. It is indeed a pleasure to address the valedictory session of the International Judicial Conference organised by the Supreme Court of India.
2. In popular perception all is well that ends well. But this conference began on a strong note. While inaugurating the conference Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I am told, highlighted the supremacy of law and lauded the role of judiciary in maintaining a delicate balance between developmental needs and the environment, as also in resolving complex issues through verdicts acceptable to all. I am also happy to note that the ethical and duty-oriented vision and expectations of Mahatma Gandhi were shared with the participants to enrich international jurisprudence. It has been highlighted that developments related to demographics and technology, and awareness about rights are causing changes having wide ramifications. I am happy to note that the role of judiciary in harmonising environmental protection and sustainable development is being given sharp focus in various countries. Similarly, the universally accepted norm of gender justice was also discussed with an approach to finding ways forward in the light of practical experiences in different justice-systems represented in this conference.
3. Here, we have a galaxy of judges and jurists representing different parts of the world. Thanks to your participation in various sessions, I have no doubt about the high standards of deliberations in this conference and its impact on resolving contemporary problems in a changing world through legal interventions. The deliberations in the past two days, I am sure, will go a long way in enriching jurisprudence at the international level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The theme chosen for the conference is timely and apt: “Judiciary and the Changing World”. In a way, change is the only constant, and the world has always been changing. In recent years, however, the world has been changing very fast, and in unforeseeable ways. The role of the judiciary is bound to be pivotal amid these dramatic transformations.
5. The selection of the topics for the working sessions of the conference could not have been more meaningful. Gender Justice, Contemporary Perspectives on Protection of Constitutional Values, Dynamic Interpretations of the Constitution in a Changing World, Harmonisation of Environment Protection vis-à-vis Sustainable Development and Protection of Right to Privacy in the Internet Age are issues that influence every member of the global community. These five distinctly defined topics cover the matrix of challenges faced by the judiciary across the world. Gender justice must remain high on the global agenda. The past decade has witnessed a debate on rising populism in the context of constitutional values. This has, in turn, led many to take a fresh look at their founding documents, the Constitutions, again. With the evolution of information technology, there have emerged new questions, for example, of data and privacy. Finally, the all-important concern of sustainable development should command far more attention than it does today. You have held wide-ranging deliberations on these issues and suggested measures to overcome the challenges.
6. I am glad to note that the judiciary in India has been alive to these themes, and has approached them in the light of the vision behind the Indian Constitution. In pursuing the cherished goal of gender justice, to mention one example, the Supreme Court of India has always been proactive and progressive. From issuing guidelines on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace two decades ago to providing directives for granting equal status to women in the army this month, the Supreme Court of India has led

progressive social transformation. With the same sensitivity, it has approached the emerging questions of biodiversity and sustainable development, keeping in mind our age-old ethos too.

7. In the process, the Supreme Court has learnt from the best practices of the apex courts abroad, just as the judicial systems elsewhere have emulated it in many instances too. Such exchanges should be whole-heartedly welcomed in the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. That is our ancient Sanskrit adage, which means the whole world is but one family. It thus calls for a holistic approach to the entire humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. The Supreme Court of India also deserves admiration for carrying out many radical reforms that made justice more accessible to common people. Landmark judgements passed by this Court have strengthened the legal and constitutional framework of our country. Its bench and bar are known for their legal scholarship and intellectual wisdom. What it has achieved is nothing less than a silent revolution in diagnosing and correcting the afflictions that adversely affected the justice delivery system. For example, the recent move towards introducing an alternative dispute resolution mechanism is expected to reduce the burden on the court to a considerable extent. Dispute resolution through mediation and conciliation would help resolve the problem amicably in an effective manner instead of resorting to a lengthy litigation process.
9. To speed up the justice delivery, of late the Indian courts have been adapting to new technologies and also considering the potential of artificial intelligence. We have been using information technology to ensure hassle-free proceedings in the court in high-profile cases. Evidence is often recorded through video conferencing. Technologies are being used to facilitate trial without hindrance. I note that the Supreme Court of India is also actively considering the ways to make courts paperless. This will obviously pave the way for speedy trial and delivery of quick justice. Such

innovations, I am confident, will also trigger similar changes in lower courts in due course of time, benefitting more and more people.

10. I will also refer to the yeoman service rendered by the Supreme Court in making the higher courts' judgments available in regional languages. This is indeed an extraordinary achievement given the linguistic diversity of India. As of now, the judgments of the Supreme Court get translated in up to nine Indian languages to make them accessible to common people. I am sure that its scope would further widen with the passage of time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. I hope you all will return to your respective seats of justice and jurisprudence with a host of ideas and with the determination to implement those which have transformative impact. I am sure that the deliberations of the conference will help strengthen the judicial system not only in India but also in other countries.
12. I am glad that the Chief Justice of India gave me this opportunity to share my thoughts with such a learned audience. I also congratulate him and his colleagues for organising this International Judicial Conference. Building on its success, I am sure, the Conference will become an annual event organised in different parts of the world for consolidation of best legal practices and ideas towards helping shape a better world.
13. I wish you all the best in your endeavours. Thank you.

Jai Hind!