

WELCOME ADDRESS

*S. K. Verma**

The Indian Law Institute, which is a premier research Institute in this part of the World, has one of its objectives to "promote the healthy development of law suitable to the social, economic and other needs of the people." In furtherance of this, we at the Institute decided to hold a seminar on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The mentally and physically challenged persons are a neglected lot of the society and more often an object of pity. There are hardly any meaningful attempts to assimilate them in the mainstream of the nation's life. The apathy towards their problems is so pervasive that even the number of the disabled persons existing in the country is not well documented. In the existing scenario of indifference the number of such persons is surging and their problems are mounting.

Besides the constitutional provisions on human rights, at present four legislations exist on the statute book relating to the disabled: the Mental Health Act, 1987; the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992; the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and the National Trust for Persons with Mental Retardation, Cerebral Palsy and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. But so far all these laws have failed to make any meaningful dent in tackling the problems of the disabled and to create an appropriate environment where such persons could exercise their rights on equal terms with other persons. It is in this context that the idea to hold a Seminar has emerged so as to identify the drawbacks in the existing legal system and to devise a conducive legal mechanism for such persons in which they can participate on equal footing. In this endeavour of ours, we are grateful to the National Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Rehabilitation Council of India, the Institute for the Physically Handicapped for sponsoring the seminar.

* Director, Indian Law Institute, New Delhi.