

As per the directions of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), the Sikkim State Legal Services Authority (Sikkim SLSA) commemorated the *National Legal Services Day* on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, in its office by felicitating one best Panel Lawyer from each district, one best Para Legal Volunteer from each district, the two convict Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) from the State Central Prison, the best College/University Legal Aid Clinic in the State and best school Legal Literacy Club from each district in recognition of their exemplary services and to celebrate their achievements.

The programme was graced by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Biswanath Somadder, Chief Justice, High Court of Sikkim & Patron-in-Chief, Sikkim SLSA, Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Bhaskar Raj Pradhan, Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Chairperson, High Court Legal Services Committee.

Hon'ble Patron-in-Chief, Sikkim SLSA in his address apprised the meeting of the importance of the day and emphasized that Access to Justice in terms of the logo of the NALSA and Sikkim SLSA has to be strictly adhered to, in order to uplift the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society. The Patron-in-Chief congratulated the Sikkim SLSA and the legal services institutions for the commendable work done by the Authority.

Hon'ble Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA in her Ladyship's address informed that 9<sup>th</sup> November every year marks the day when the Legal Services Authorities Act was passed. The Panel Advocates and PLVs were commended on their contribution to the cause of free legal aid and for generating legal awareness in all sections of society, more especially the marginalized sections.

The active performance of the PLVs who act as intermediaries bridging the gap between the common people and the Legal Services Institutions to remove impediments to access to justice was also highlighted as also their contribution in monitoring cases of missing children in Police Stations, assisting the senior citizens and persons below poverty line to avail various welfares schemes of State/Central Government and acting as Support Persons for assisting the child victims of sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 were also highlighted her Ladyship. The activities undertaken by two educated Convict PLVs lodged at the State Central Prison, Rongyek received special mention.

A mention was also made with regard to the 42 (*forty-two*) Legal Literacy Clubs established by Sikkim SLSA in various schools across the State and Legal Aid Clinics established at Sikkim Government Law College, ICFAI University and Sikkim University, to generate legal awareness. Further, for the inmates lodged at the Sikkim State Central Prison, Rongyek and District Prison, Boomtar, the Sikkim SLSA is providing Psychiatrists and Psychologists from the Health & Family Welfare Department to deal with mental health issues which arise on account of them being in custody or those who are recovering from drug addiction, and, Counsellors from rehabilitation centres are visiting on regular basis for providing counselling to such inmates.

Thereafter, Certificate of Commendation and Mementoes were distributed by the Hon'ble Dignitaries to the best Panel Lawyers, PLVs and school legal literacy clubs from each district, two convict PLVs from the State Central Prison (*represented by the Jailer, State Central Prison, Rongyek*) and the best legal aid clinic in the State.

The programme was also attended by Ld. Judicial Officers from the High Court Registry, Ld. Panel Advocates, PLVs, Teacher-in-Charge, students of the Legal Aid Clinics and Legal Literacy Clubs (*the Legal Literacy Clubs from South, West and North Districts and the two Convicts from the State Central Prison attended the programme on virtual mode*), officers and staff of the High Court Registry, Sikkim SLSA and Press & Media.

The welcome address was delivered by Mr. Jagat B. Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Praveen Pradhan, Deputy Secretary, Sikkim SLSA.