

**ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA**  
Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110 001

**PRESS NOTE**

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24<sup>th</sup> January, 2018

**ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA HOSTS  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
'INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ELECTION PROCESS'  
AND SIGNS  
MoUs ON ELECTORAL COOPERATION WITH  
GUINEA, MOLDOVA AND INTERNATIONAL IDEA**

On the occasion of 8<sup>th</sup> National Voters Day on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018, Election Commission of India (ECI) hosted an International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Election Process' on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Delegates at the Conference included Chairpersons/Commissioners / Senior Officials of five Election Management Bodies (EMBs) viz. Australia, Bhutan, Guinea, Moldova & Zambia and Heads of two International Organisations viz. International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).



***Chief Election Commissioner Sh. O. P. Rawat while addressing the conference***

In his Inaugural Address, Mr. O.P.Rawat, Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner of India, reiterated ECI's resolve to uphold the sanctity of free, fair and peaceful elections in keeping with the rich democratic traditions of India. He stated that ECI is committed to the objective that the Persons with Disabilities have the right to full electoral participation, on the basis of equality and shall not be discriminated against on any ground. He pointed out that it was high time to move

away from tokenism and ensure participation of PwDs in exercising their franchise. He highlighted the major initiatives taken by the ECI to ensure provision of basic facilities at the polling stations making them conducive for Persons with Disabilities to exercise their right to vote. He expressed the hope that the conference would provide useful takeaways for all stakeholders in this endeavour.

In his address, Election Commissioner Mr. Sunil Arora mentioned that while Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the principal and universal legal instrument that lays the foundation of universal adult suffrage, the 2006 UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically recognize the rights of PwDs. These international treaties and our Constitution lay down the broad policy inclusive framework for ECI. He cited the inspiring cases of Mr. Stephen Hawking, the famous author and physicist as well as Dr. Alim Chandani from the US for their pioneering work related to the inclusion of PwDs in the society at large.

Election Commissioner Mr. Ashok Lavasa mentioned that elections provide unique opportunity to enhance participation and mould public perceptions about the potential of PwDs, include their voice as equal citizens and set the stage for their social and economic integration. He quoted the famous words of Mr. Stephen Hawking *“We have a moral duty to remove the barriers to participation, and to invest sufficient funding and expertise to unlock the vast potential of people with disabilities”*. He further stated that impressive campaigns through attractive communication strategies for connecting with the PwD voters have been developed and adopted by many countries. This conference would result in a robust interaction and sharing of experiences from the participants which would result in useful learning from each other.

In his welcome address, Mr. Umesh Sinha, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner highlighted the significance of the National Voters’ Day celebrated every year on 25<sup>th</sup> January. He stated that the Conference is part of ECI’s initiative to make elections and electoral processes accessible to all. ‘Accessible Elections’ has been selected as central theme of this year’s ‘National Voter’s Day’ celebration. The theme, that seamlessly integrates into the underlying philosophy of universal adult suffrage and the concept of ‘No voter to be left behind.’ In his presentation titled ‘Crossing the Barriers: Making Elections Friendly and Accessible for PwDs in India’, he briefed the delegates on the major barriers and challenges faced by the PwDs and the initiatives taken by the ECI in ensuring their inclusion in the electoral process.

There were three sessions during the Conference where senior delegates from EMBs and International Organisations participated. International delegates which included Heads / Senior officials of several EMBs as mentioned above and Head of IFES and International IDEA gave their presentations and shared their experiences, best practices and initiatives aimed at electoral engagement, enrolment and active participation in ballot exercise by PwDs in various countries.

**Launch of ECI's Social Media Hub :** During the Conference, the Election Commission of India launched its Social Media Hub comprising Facebook and Youtube as part of its outreach programme for public at large.

**MoUs signed:** On the sidelines of the Conference on 24 January 2018, ECI signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the field of election management with the following bodies :

- (1) National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of Guinea
- (2) Central Election Commission of Moldova
- (3) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance



***Election Commission of India along with representatives of EMBs from Moldova & Republic of Guinea and Int. IDEA after signing of MoUs.***

The MoUs provide for an institutional framework and aim for promotion of exchanges of knowledge and experience in the field of organizational and technical development, with a view to strengthening the administration of electoral processes; exchange of information, material, expertise and technical know how relating to electoral processes and systems; training of personnel and organizational development and capacity building.

Election Commission of India has so far signed MOUs with more than twenty Election Management Bodies and international organizations across the world for cooperation in election administration and management.

The Conference has been organized under the VoICE.NET platform the global knowledge network which has membership from more than 25 Election Management Bodies and International Organisations. The International Conference has been organised with the purpose of sharing the experience of different EMB's, International Institutions and Experts with regard to analysis of barriers, policy interventions, strategies, programmes, good practices and technological innovation for inclusion of PwD's in electoral processes.

The quarterly magazine issued under the VoICE.NET – 'VoICE International' had its third issue dedicated to the cause of the PwD's. The Issue carries rich experience for knowledge sharing on inclusion PwD's across the world of democracies.

The international delegates will also be attending the National Voters Day Celebrations in New Delhi besides visiting the upcoming campus of the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) at Dwarka, New Delhi on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

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**(Ajoy Kumar)**  
Secretary, ECI