

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY
HON'BLE CJI JUSTICE N V RAMANA
AT THE FELICITATION BY THE WOMEN ADVOCATES OF SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
IIC, New Delhi, 26 September, 2021.

Karl Marx in different times and in a different context said: “*Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains*”. I am taking the liberty to modify it a bit to: “*Women of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains*”.

Enough of suppression of 1000s of years. It is high time we have 50% representation of women in judiciary. It is your right. It is not a matter of charity.

Women constitute only about 30% of the lower judiciary. In High Courts, women judges constitute 11.5%. Here in the Supreme Court, we currently have 4 women justices out of the sitting 33. That makes it just 12%. Of the 1.7 million advocates, only 15% are women. Only 2% of the elected representatives in the State Bar Councils are women. No woman member in the Bar Council of India.

This needs urgent correction.

I am also forcing the Executive for applying necessary correctives.

I am happy to have colleagues in the collegium who are progressive and determined to bridge the gap in the higher judiciary.

Women face various difficulties entering the profession.

Gender stereotypes forcing them to bear the brunt of family burdens.

Clients’ preference for male advocates, uncomfortable environment within Courtrooms, lack of infrastructure, crowded courtrooms, lack of washrooms for women etc. – all these deter women from entering the profession.

In the survey I got conducted, it turned out that out of 6000 Trial Courts nearly 22% have no toilet for women. The National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation I have proposed will ensure inclusive

design of Court complexes. We need to create a more welcoming environment.

An important focus area is to increase gender diversity in legal education. I strongly advocate reservation of a significant percentage of seats in law schools and universities for women, as a first step.

Ultimately, inclusion of women judges and lawyers will substantially improve the quality of justice delivery.

My Sisters here have carved out a name for themselves already. My dear Sisters, your actions in upholding the Constitution will inspire women, not only in this profession but in all walks of life. Everyone here, women lawyers and my Sister judges, are role models for young girls who are hoping to enter the profession.

Rest assured I will wholeheartedly support initiatives that will further the cause of eliminating gender disparity in the profession.

As far as designation of Senior Advocates are concerned, with the passing of Shri Soli Sorabjee, the concerned Committee needs to be reconstituted. It will be done in the near future.

When it comes to physical hearings, we Judges have no problems as we sit in protected enclosures. We are concerned about the well being of advocates and support staff. Hopefully we will be able to open up fully after Dussehra. Let us hope and pray that there will not be any third wave.

Advocates' Association has expressed concerns about SOP issued for physical hearing. I have directed the Registry to correct the SOP suitably.

Will soon initiate the training programs on mediation.

Thank you.

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(It may please be noted that this is not the verbatim transcript of Hon'ble CJI's speech)