

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Common Cause House, New Delhi on 24.03.2007

Maj. Gen. J. P. Gupta, Vice-President, chaired the meeting in the absence of the President. He called the meeting to order at 11.00 A.M. As the quorum was not complete till 11.15 A.M., the meeting was adjourned for 15 minutes in accordance with the Rules. The AGM was reconvened at 11.30 A.M. Only twelve members attended the meeting.

At the outset, the Chairman referred to the sad demise of the former Chief Executive, Mr. P.K. Dave. Paying glowing tributes to the departed, he recalled that inspite of his failing health, Mr. Dave had agreed to take over the reins of COMMON CAUSE after the death of Mr. H. D. Shourie. Endowed with a deep social commitment, Mr. Dave conducted the affairs of the Society with dedication and professionalism, relying on his vast experience in governance and in-depth knowledge of the problems of Delhi. During his stewardship, the Society was able to uphold the highest traditions of public service set by its Founder-Director, Mr. H. D. Shourie. The members observed two minutes silence as a mark of respect to Mr. Dave.

The Chairman stated that we are now on the threshold of a new phase in the existence of the Society, since the first generation of leadership, which had firmly established the credentials of COMMON CAUSE in India, has passed away. As a part of the way ahead, the Executive Committee has carefully studied the framework of COMMON CAUSE. It has put together a set of statements that define our Vision, Mission & Goals and spell out the Strategies and Means to achieve them, and the Processes to be used. These statements have been adopted by the Governing Council in its meeting held on 08.03.2007. The Governing Council has also carried out certain changes in the Rules & Regulations of COMMON CAUSE, primarily with a view to streamlining its functioning. The amended Rules will be published in the forthcoming issue of our journal for the information of the members.

The Chairman introduced the new Director, Mr. K. K. Jaswal, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Information Technology, and made a brief mention of his credentials. He expressed the hope that under Mr. Jaswal's leadership, the Society will grow from strength to strength and fulfil its social obligations.

The Chairman informed the members that the Governing Council has been reconstituted in accordance with the provisions of the amended Rules & Regulations. Apart from the Director,

three new members, viz., Mr. Prashant Bhushan, Ms. Madhu Kishwar and Mr. Prakash Singh, have been inducted in the Governing Council in its meeting held on 08-03-2007.

Introducing the new members of the Governing Council, the Chairman stated that Mr. Prashant Bhushan is an eminent lawyer and a committed social activist, who has taken up a number of cases for the welfare of the disadvantaged sections of the Society, COMMON CAUSE has filed several petitions through him. He has always rendered great assistance in legal matters to the Society without seeking any remuneration. Ms. Madhu Kishwar is a renowned scholar and the Founder Editor of Manushi. She has been an indefatigable champion of the causes of workers in the unorganized sector. Mr. Prakash Singh had a distinguished career in the Indian Police Service, having held the top posts of DGP, Assam, DGP, Uttar Pradesh and Director General, B.S.F. He is an authority on the subject of Police Reforms and a co-petitioner with COMMON CAUSE in the Writ Petition in which the Supreme Court has pronounced a landmark judgement on Police Reforms.

The Chairman, thereafter, requested the Director to initiate discussions on the Agenda Items. Thanking the Chairman for his kind introduction, the Director stated that it was an honour and a challenge for him to occupy the position held earlier by stalwarts like Mr. H. D. Shourie and Mr. P.K.Dave. He assured the House that he would strive to carry on the work of his illustrious predecessors and secure speedy redress for the problems of the common man.

Consideration of the Annual Report and adoption of the Annual Accounts:

The Director presented the Annual Report of the Society for the year 2005-06 and briefly apprised the members of the present status of the cases mentioned therein. The members expressed their satisfaction over the information furnished and adopted the Annual Report and Audited Accounts.

Activities and Programmes:

The Director briefly explained the statement of Vision, Mission and Goals adopted by the Governing Council and the strategies, means and processes to be employed to realise them. He also informed the members that during the year 2007-08, the endeavours of the Society would primarily focus on the following thrust areas:

- i. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: to help make the program effective.
- ii. Right to Information Act: to prevent its dilution and to ensure full compliance.
- iii. Police Reform: to push all state governments to pass the requisite bills and implement them.
- iv. Judicial Reforms: Focusing on the dimensions of quality, cost and timeliness of justice delivery.
- v. Service Level Agreements: adoption by public sector service providers.
- vi. Foreign Contribution Regulation Act/Foreign Contribution (Management and Control) Bill: to ensure that genuine civil society organisations are not denied access to foreign funding through excessive legislation.
- vii. Witness Protection Plan: to evolve a feasible system of insulating key witnesses from undue influence and harassment.

The Director then invited suggestions on the priorities outlined above and any other issues which could be taken up from the platform of COMMON CASUE.

Mr. Mahender Singh wanted to know the stand of COMMON CAUSE on the important issue of Euthanasia, which is being agitated before the Supreme Court of India. The Director clarified that COMMON CAUSE has not supported Euthanasia, as the term is commonly understood, but only pleaded for recognition of "The Right to Die with Dignity" after executing a "Living Will". Euthanasia as such can be misused and also have serious implications for the doctors attending on the terminally ill and the very old, as well as their families.

Wg. Cdr. (Dr.) G.C. Bhattacharya raised the following points:

- i. Exclusion of Non Practising Allowance from the computation of pension payable to doctors in the Defence services.

- ii. Deficiencies in the contributory medical care scheme for retired Defence personnel (ECHS).
- iii. Need for generalised exemption for retired Defence personnel from payment of Property Tax.
- iv. Special concessions for retired Defence personnel in respect of the services provided by DDA.

Maj. Gen. J.P. Gupta, himself a retired Army officer, agreed that there were some anomalies in Defence pensions. The matter is before the Supreme Court. The best course could be to resolve them through the Sixth Central Pay Commission. Tax reliefs and concessions to Defence pensioners can effectively be agitated through forums like Ex-Servicemen's Associations. These do not fall in the current priorities of the Society.

Mr. Prashant Bhushan: In the context of Thrust Areas for 2007-2008 outlined by the Director, Mr. Prashant Bhushan explained the genesis of the Witness Protection Programme under which new identities were given to witnesses deposing against the Mafia in the United States. In ordinary criminal cases, witnesses turn hostile for a variety of reasons, including inaccuracies in the record of testimony of witnesses, financial inducement and threats. He felt that it is for the Court to go to the root of each matter and punish the guilty party. There cannot be any generalised protection for all witnesses in criminal cases. There is also a recent ruling of the Supreme Court of India on the subject.

Mr. Prashant Bhushan generally endorsed the choice of Thrust Areas made by the Governing Council and suggested that COMMON CAUSE should continue to focus on the issues concerning the common people, particularly the disadvantaged sections of the society; the privileged classes can take care of their own interests.

Ms. Madhu Kishwar agreed with the views of Mr. Prashant Bhushan and invited COMMON CAUSE to lend its support to the causes concerning the underprivileged, such as slum dwellers, street vendors, rickshaw pullers and the like. She cautioned that vested interests may be behind many of the drives undertaken by the civic

authorities. For example, the traders of Chandni Chowk are keen to evict rickshaw pullers to create space for parking lots and throw out street vendors, who take away their custom.

The Director suggested that Mr. Prashant Bhushan and Ms. Madhu Kishwar may present their ideas to the Governing Council / Executive Committee for a decision on the future course of action.

Appointment of Auditors for the year 2006-2007

The Director informed the members that the work of the Auditors has continued to be quite satisfactory. Thereupon, Mr. N. Ahuja proposed that they may be reappointed for the year 2006-2007; the proposal was seconded by Wg. Cdr (Dr) G. C. Bhattacharya

Elections:

Maj. Gen. Gupta informed the members that as per the Rules, two longest serving members of the Governing Council, namely, Maj. Gen. U.C. Dubey and Mr. Ashwani Khurana would be retiring at the AGM. As per past practice, it was proposed that the members could send their suggestions and recommendations regarding the resultant vacancies to the President within two weeks to enable him to nominate two persons to fill up the vacancies. Those nominated would be deemed to have been elected by the AGM.

The meeting was concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

(Maj. Gen. J. P. Gupta)
Vice-President

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(Maj. Gen. J. P. Gupta)
Vice-President

Kamal,
Thanks, brief and
to the point. clear
and explanative
with regards

[Signature]
3/4/07