**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF COMMON CAUSE**

**Date:**  April 23, 2015

**Venue:** Common Cause House, Nelson Mandela Marg, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

**Participants:**

Mr VikramLal      President Emeritus

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) J. P. Gupta Vice President Emeritus

Dr. B. P. Mathur Vice President

Dr. DivyaJalan

Mr LalitNirula

Mr JyotiSagar

Mr ParanjoyGuhaThakurta

Dr. Vipul Mudgal Director

Mr. Pankaj Gupta Special Invitee

Leave of Absence was granted to Mr Prakash Singh, Mr Kamal Kant Jaswal, Dr Ashok Khosla, Mr Prashant Bhushan and Ms Madhu Kishwar

Due to leave of absence of the President and on the request of the Governing Council the President Emeritus chaired the proceedings.

1. **Confirmation of minutes**

Minutes of the Governing Council meeting held on March 27, 2015 were confirmed.

1. **Approval/ Guidelines for New Applicants of Membership/ Life Membership of Common Cause Society**

Director sought Governing Council’s advise on matters of membership, particularly on the procedures for the approval of new life members, and if there was a need to raise the life membership to Rs 5000 (from the present Rs 2500), and associate membership to Rs 1000 (from present 500) due to inflation.He said even though the Executive Committee is empowered to approve memberships, it might be a good idea to revisit the membership norms from time to time. Many members pointed out that easy or automatic membership norms have led to a variety of problems -- and even entry of questionable elements –in many other societies. It was felt that as a principle, life memberships should be by invitation, though it might be desirable to offer student memberships (non-voting) to young people as ‘friends of Common Cause.’

After an animated discussion, it was decided that the entry to life membership should have some standards and safeguards and membership contributions should not be accepted through direct bank transfer. It was decided to raise the life membership with voting rights to Rs 5000 and retain the fee for other categories at the present level. It was also suggested that those seeking life membership should be asked to provide two references from people in public life and a detailed statement about their interest in public causes in general and in Common Cause in particular. It was also felt that the EC could explore the possibility of making it compulsory for new life members to get recommendations from two existing life members whose list could be made available on demand.

The Director also tabled a note on developments/ updates in ongoing cases and advocacy efforts as follows:

**PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION**

**WP(C) 463/2012: Illegal allocation of captive coal blocks:** Arguments were concluded and judgment reserved on April 13, 2015 in the IA 13 filed by Common Cause in 2014. The IA underlined determined efforts by the then Director CBI to subvert the investigation and prosecution of the coal scam cases. Common Cause requested for a court-monitored investigation by an SIT or by the Anti-Corruption Bureau of Delhi Police. During the hearing on April 6, 2015 the apex Court had expressed surprise over the CBI arriving at a decision to file a closure report in a given case and then going for further probe to examine a particular angle and said this was “a peculiar manner of investigation”. The Court has listed the matter for April 27, 2015 for hearing the views of the SPP on the legal issues raised in the note filed by CBI on April 6, 2015.

**WP 728/2013: Undoing the mala fide favours to RIL in KG Basin:** During the hearing on March 30, 2015 the apex Court granted time to RIL to file their response to the CAG report filed earlier by Common Cause. The solicitor general requested for time to study the report of the PAC on the recommendations of the CAG report. The Court granted time to the Union Govt. to file a status report regarding the proceedings. This matter has been posted for May 5, 2015 for directions.

**WP 114/2014:** [**Writ against Illegal Mining in the State of Odisha**](http://commoncause.in/Recent_PILs/MiningintheStateofOdisha.php)**:** This matter was taken up by the apex Court on March 25, 2015 on an IA filed by Sarda Mine’s pleading permission to resume mining operations which had been suspended since April 2014 pursuant to the PIL filed by Common Cause against alleged illegal mining in Odisha. The Court directed the petitioners to file a rejoinder within a week, which has since been filed. This matter is likely to be taken up on April 29, 2015.

**Advocacy Initiatives:**

**Multi-level Marketing & Ponzi Schemes:**

Common Cause has been pursuing the issue of pyramid schemes functioning under the garb of MLM companies and also corresponding with the authorities concerned. Under the Prize Chits and Money Circulation Schemes (Banning) Act, 1978, the practice of camouflaging money circulation schemes as direct-selling schemes for distribution of goods and services has become firmly established.It had been decided to file a writ in the Supreme Court in this regard, when it was learnt that the Government under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has already established an Inter-Ministerial Committee to examine the global best-practices and other relevant issues in consultation with all stakeholders. Common Cause has filed RTI application seeking a copy of the Report. It has been decided to follow up the matter and take action on need basis. Regarding ponzi schemes, it is learnt that in a recent meeting chaired by Union minister of State for Finance it has been decided to set up a Permanent Central Coordination Mechanism which would act against money deposit and collection frauds. As reported in the media, the government wishes to devise a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to deal with the illegal activity as also to ascertain the risks posed by such frauds to the country’s financial system.

**Other activities:**

The Director attended the Annual National Conference of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) on Electoral and Political Reforms in Kolkata and convened a special session on media, money-power and elections. He also participated in the proceedings of citizens’ monitoring of elections in the North Eastern States. The two-day conference was organised by West-Bengal Election Watch and ADR on March 21-22 at the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, Kolkata. It was attended, among others, by the CEC Mr H S Brahma and many leading citizens and politicians of West Bengal.

**Thrust Areas and Future Initiatives, Plans and Strategies**

Director presented his Vision Document (enclosed: Annexure 1)which was followed by a discussion.The members expressed their support and approval to the idea of continuing the vision, mission and objectives of Common Cause and dividing its work under the rubrics of interventions, events and advocacy.The Director also spelt out the above three areas with examples of possible tasks, partnerships and interventions in the light of the organization’s immediate challenges and core strengths. It was felt that the resources should not be a problem for expanding or for scaling up tasks and activities.

While the ideas listed in the vision document were enthusiastically endorsed the following concrete suggestions were given:

1. The Status Report on Police and a performance/ satisfaction index must be pursued on priority and the survey needs to spread wider rather than be restricted to limited areas. The police status report must be treated as a full project in its own right.It was also felt that the quality is of paramount value and adequate tests/ pilots must be conducted before commissioning the index.

While we need to address issues of the print, electronic and Internet media in a more holistic way, asimilar Index on mediaperformance or ratingswill require more thrashing out.

1. Common Cause could learn from other democratic organizations and pro-publica groups which are seeking to promote media quality, impartiality and investigative journalism.
2. Common cause should look more closely at the quality of education, particularly technical education. It was felt that many professional institutions are handing out degrees without imparting professional education.
3. The citizens’ Fundamental Rights are well understood but there is a need to popularize among the youththe Citizens’ Fundamental Duties as envisaged in Article 51 (A) of the Constitution of India.
4. Common Cause should pursue Administrative Reforms and work on evolving a code of ethics for the civil services. It was suggested that it could hold a seminar or dialogue involving renowned former civil servants, cabinet secretariesand experts and followed by a policy-oriented action/ publication.It was felt that the President, Common Cause can help through his contacts in this endeavor.

(Vikram Lal)

President Emeritus