**Draft Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of Common Cause**

The Executive Committee of Common Cause met at Common Cause House on February 10, 2014 at 11:30 a.m. Maj. Gen. (Retd.) J.P. Gupta, Dr.Ashok Khosla, Shri Kamal Jaswal and Shri Surjit Das attended the meeting.

**New initiatives in public interest litigation**

The Director briefed the Committee about the developments since its last meeting on January 17, 2014.

Common Cause joined hands with Centre for Public Interest Litigation to challenge the discretionary allotment of prime residential plots to VIPs in Odisha and Gujarat. The petition came up before the Supreme Court on January 24, 2014. Justice A K Patnaik, who was on the bench, recused himself. The petition is to be listed now before a bench that does not include him.

In the context of the Union Government’s inaction on the first report of the Justice M. B. Shah Commission of Inquiry on the mining of iron ore and manganese in Odisha, a writ petition was filed in the Supreme Court, seeking urgent action to stop the reckless plunder of precious natural resources of the state by vested interests. The PIL has been listed for March 3, 2014.

A writ repetition seeking systemic reforms in the management of Defence Lands is likely to be filed in the next few days.

**Improving learning outcomes**

Good Earth Education Foundation and Common Cause have been exploring various options for advocacy and public interest litigation to address the issue of poor learning outcomes of the elementary education provided in the public school system.

 In this context, the Director and Shri Surjit Das had a useful meeting with Ms.Vrinda Sarup, Additional Secretary, School Education & Literacy, on February 7, 2014. She indicated that the Ministry of Human Resource Development was deeply concerned about the poor outcomes of elementary education, although it had some issues with the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) brought out by Pratham. In the current phase of implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, the Ministry is prioritizing the quality dimension over the provision of inputs for universal access to elementary education. She also mentioned that the Ministry’s latest instructions to the States focus on a structured approach to the foundational skills of reading, writing, comprehension and mathematics in grades 1 & 2, and teaching of mathematics and science at the upper primary level. These instructions also establish a linkage between the release of funds to the development of a comprehensive quality plan and authorise the use of programme funds for conducting periodic and independent assessment of student learning levels. Ms. Sarup agreed that the RTE Act was weak on accountability and teachers governance, because the dominant viewpoint in the Ministry emphasized the teacher's autonomy and self-motivation. To what extent this deficiency could be corrected through a PIL remains to be explored.

The Director informed the Committee that a meeting with Dr. Madhav Chavan, founder of Pratham, and his colleagues from the ASER Centre to decide on the strategy of our proposed intervention was planned for the next week.

**Abatement of air pollution**

The Committee agreed that the continuing aggravation of the air pollution levels in the National Capital Region called for concerted action on the part of civil society. It was felt that Common Cause should lend its support to the NGOs which have actively been campaigning for appropriate statutory, fiscal and administrative measures to reverse this trend. In this context, it was vital to institute an independent system of monitoring the air pollution levels in the Capital, as the experience of Beijing has demonstrated. The Director requested Dr. Ashok Khosla to share the experience of Development Alternatives in this domain and also to give his considered advice for taking the matter further.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

 **(Maj. Gen. (Retd.) J. P. Gupta)**