

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

**Date:** October 27, 2015

**Time:** 3.30 PM

**Venue:** Common Cause House, Vasant Kunj

### **Participants:**

Mr Vikram Lal President Emeritus

Mr Kamal Kant Jaswal President

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

Dr. B. P. Mathur Vice President

Mr Lalit Nirula

Mr Jyoti Sagar

Dr Ashok Khosla

Mr Paranjay Guha Thakurta

Dr. Vipul Mudgal Director

Leave of Absence was granted to Mr Prakash Singh, Dr. Divya Jalan, Mr Prashant Bhushan and Ms Madhu Kishwar.

### **1. Confirmation of minutes**

Minutes of the Governing Council meeting held on July 20, 2015 were confirmed.

## **2. Ratification of circular resolutions**

The Council took note of and ratified the following resolutions approved by circulation on September 29, 2015.

- "Resolved that a sum of Rs. 9,00,000 be set aside as provided in section 11(2) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 and to be spent till 31.03.2020 for the following purposes:
  - i) Development of an interactive website
  - ii) Mobile phone and social media outreach
  - iii) Conducting research-based surveys and data compilation
  - iv) Research on social policy and governance
  - v) Policy-dialogues and brainstorming sessions

Resolved further that Shri Vipul Mudgal, Director of Common Cause, and Mr. Kamal Kant Jaswal, President of Common Cause, be authorized to sign and file Form 10 with the Income Tax return of the Society, and do all such acts, deeds, matters and things, as it may in its absolute discretion deem necessary, proper or desirable and to settle any question, difficulty or doubt that may arise in regard thereto."

- "Resolved to approve and adopt the Annual Accounts and Audit Report of the Society and the Trust for the year 2014-15."

## **3. Director's presentation of the Annual Report 2014-15**

The Director presented the Annual Report of the activities of Common Cause during 2014-15 which was circulated earlier along with the revised agenda of the Governing Council meeting. This included the Society's activities since the beginning of the year and also the progress made in the various legal cases taken up by the Society and those in the pipeline.

## **4. Annual Report of the Society for the year 2014-15.**

"Resolved to approve and adopt the Annual Report of the Society for the year 2014-15 for circulating to all the members of the Society along with the notice of the forthcoming Annual General Meeting likely to be held in February/March 2016."

#### **5. Common Cause Case Updates:**

The case updates presented by the Director are included in the Annual Report mentioned above.

#### **6. Presentation of the Society's activities:**

The Director reviewed the Society's activities since the last meeting and tabled a detailed note on the cases in the pipeline, ongoing PILs and advocacy initiatives. It was felt that some of the activities like police reforms and work on implementation of the Right to Education Act would need additional resources.

The Council felt that the Society's FCRA registration must be kept alive for future, but at this juncture, foreign contributions funds need not be solicited.

The members expressed satisfaction over the work being done on the new Common Cause website, and appreciated the layout and presentation of the Case Library.

The Council was informed that preparatory work for the integration of the Inclusive Media for Change project with Common Cause by December 2015 was underway.

#### **Advocacy Initiatives:**

Initiative for Police Reforms: The Governing Council had an animated discussion on the Director's account of his meetings and exchanges with senior members of

Lokniti programme of the CSDS and the CHRI Director regarding the State of Policing Report and an Index of Performance/ Perception. A view was expressed on making the methodologies robust and credible and the need to conduct a pilot study in some states before embarking on a nationwide survey. The President felt that Common Cause should have a firm agreement with the collaborators so that the responsibilities are clearly assigned and understood by all. The Director apprised the GC of the progress so far and said he would keep the President and the GC members in the loop.

Initiative on Right to Education: It was felt that the focus of our advocacy efforts should be on the quality of education and that lessons must be learnt from best practices and success stories in other parts of India, particularly in the voluntary sector. In this context, a reference was made to the experience of Deepalaya, where technology has innovatively been deployed for transparency and for better learning outcomes.

The members were of the view that the elimination of examinations has contributed to the worsening of the standards in rural schools.

It was felt that the enforcement of rules framed under RTE is loaded against schools run by civil society. In particular, civil society schools are unable to meet the stringent land requirements in big cities where land is scarce. Most government schools also fail to meet these requirements, but they are not proceeded against. This discrimination needs to be challenged in the appropriate forum.

Within the government sector, there is discrimination in the matter of resource endowment, faculty deployment and oversight between different categories of schools, e.g. Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sainik Vidyalaya, and others. As a result, the learning outcomes vary widely across categories. Advocacy efforts should focus on narrowing down these disparities.

It was also felt that the issue of school dropouts needs to be addressed on priority. The example of Karnataka is worthy of emulation.

Common Cause representations on telecom tower radiation: The Director apprised the members of the research-based representations sent to the authorities on hazards of radiation emitted by mobile towers. It is documented that these towers emit harmful Electro Magnetic Frequency/Radiation (EMF/EMR) round the clock. The towers are mounted in close proximity to residential and official buildings, hospitals and playgrounds. The people living within ten meters of mobile towers receive signals which are several thousand times stronger than the safe limits. It was also stated that while the operators keep blaming call-drops on low spectrum availability and high license charges, the Telecom Secretary has said on record that there is severe lack of investment on part of the operators. The GC members felt that the focus of our efforts should be balancing concerns for call-drops and those of radiation hazards. It was also felt that there should be on-line monitoring systems in the interest of the consumers.

## **7. Discussion on Course of Action on NJAC judgment**

The GC members expressed serious concerns about the functioning of the collegium system for appointments to the higher judiciary. It was, however, felt that in the wake of the Supreme Court judgment on the National Judicial Appointment Commission, the best option for us would be to press for systemic improvements within the ambit of the judgment. Accordingly, it was agreed that Common Cause would organise a consultation in the coming weeks to firm up its views on what needs to be done to institute a fair and objective system of selection under the collegium.

The Meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the chair.

(Kamal Kant Jaswal)

President