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March 13, 2008

**Minutes of the Governing Council meeting held on March 8, 2008 at Common Cause House, New Delhi**

Present

1. Mr. Vikram Lal  -----    President
2. Maj.Gen. J. P. Gupta       ----  Vice President
3. Ms. Madhu Kishwar
4. Dr. B. P. Mathur              ----  Hony. Treasurer
5. Mr. K. K. Jaswal  -----    Director

The President welcomed the members and commenced the proceedings.

Leave of  absence was granted to Maj. Gen U. C. Dubey, Dr. Divya Jalan, Dr. Ashok Khosla, Mr. Jyoti Sagar, Mr. Prakash Singh and Mr. Prashant Bhushan.

The President condoled the death of Mr. J. R. Jindal, member of the Governing Council, and recalled his distinguished services to the society and to Common Cause in particular. A trusted comrade–in–arms of the Founder Director, Mr. H. D. Shourie, Mr. Jindal served on the Governing Council for over 15 years and played an active part in formulating the policies of the Society.  His contribution to Common Cause will always be remembered and cherished.

The President extended a warm welcome to Dr. B. P. Mathur, who was inducted in the Governing Council in August 2008, and thanked him for agreeing to assume the onerous responsibility of Hony. Treasurer of the Society.

The following decisions were taken in respect of the items on the Agenda.

1. **Confirmation of Minutes**

Minutes of the Governing Council Meeting held on March 8, 2007 were confirmed.

1. **Ratification of Agenda items approved by circulation.**

The following resolutions approved by circulation since the last meeting of the Council were confirmed and taken on record.

1. Resolution dated April 4, 2007 for the nomination of Mr. Ashok Khosla, Member, Governing Council, as member of the Executive Committee.
2. Resolution dated May 3, 2007 for the designation of Mr. K. K. Jaswal, Director, as the Editor/Publisher/Printer of “COMMON CAUSE” Journal.
3. Resolution dated October 25, 2007 for the appointment of Dr. B. P. Mathur as Hony. Treasurer of the Common Cause Society.
4. Resolution dated October 25, 2007 for setting aside a sum of Rs. 2,26,000/- u/s 11(2) of the Income Tax Act to be spent till March 31, 2012 for certain specified purposes.
5. Resolution dated October 25, 2007 for approval and adoption of the Annual Report, Annual Accounts and Audit Report of the Society and the Trust for the year 2006-2007.
6. **Presentation of the Society’s activities and programme of action.**

The Director apprised the Council of the efforts made to put in place a team of part-time researchers at Common Cause and encourage them to develop domain knowledge in different fields of governance and acquire ownership of the projects being pursued by the Society in the fields allotted to them.  As the researchers have been drawn from among the students registered at the Jawaharlal Nehru University for Ph.D/M.Phil, the attrition rate has been rather high.  In the interest of continuity, it is proposed to form, in due course, a core team of full time researchers and offer them a reasonable opportunity of career progression.

The Director also informed the Council of the steps taken to create the nucleus of a documentation centre cum library and the in-principle approval of a donation of                     Rs 2,00,000/- by Pirojsha Sonabhai Godrej Foundation for this purpose.

Reviewing the progress of the endeavors of the Society in the thrust areas identified in the Annual General Meeting held on March 24, 2007, the Director stated that the following action points have been identified in respect of the National Employment Rural Guarantee Scheme.

1. Fine-tuning of the Piece Rate Compensation Schedules to ensure that women, elderly workers and those with disability are not denied the statutory minimum wage.
2. Proper estimation of the non-wage component of NREGA works to ensure their utility and durability.
3. Technology mission to improve labour productivity.
4. Extension of the scope of social audit to cover the functionaries at the district level and above.

It was agreed that a consultation with concerned civil society organizations may be organized to workout the strategy for addressing these issues.  The conclusions of the consultation may then be presented to the Ministry of Rural Development. Ms. Madhu Kishwar suggested that an objective evaluation on the impact of NREGA may be attempted by compiling and analyzing critical and favorable reports on the implementation of the scheme in the field.

As regards the related issue of empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Common Cause has joined hands with Parivartan, which has collected a vast body of field data from Madhya Pradesh.   After a detailed analysis of the field data and the budget documents on devolution of resources, Parivartan and Common Cause will take the issue of non-implementation of the provisions of the 73rd Constitution Amendment to the High Court, as advised by the Supreme Court while allowing the withdrawal of the writ petition filed by Common Cause in August 2007. Similar action would be taken in collaboration with appropriate partner organizations in the light of the Madhya Pradesh initiative.

The issue of non-compliance of directions of the Supreme Court in its judgment on Police Reforms is being actively pursued by Mr. Prakash Singh and contempt proceedings have been initiated against the states that have willfully defied the directions.  This resistance to police reforms has also been highlighted by the Times of India group                   newspapers following an interaction organized by Common Cause.  The Society is also contributing to the campaign for awareness building and mobilization of popular support for Police Reforms.

Ms. Kishwar suggested that an exhaustive analysis of the model Police Act formulated by the Soli Sorabjee Committee may be undertaken and appropriate modifications suggested, wherever necessary.  She volunteered to do the advocacy for the model Police Act, as its adoption was of vital importance to the common man, who has a stake in good governance.

As regards judicial reforms, a writ petition is shortly to be filed in the Supreme Court jointly with Janhit Manch and other likeminded organizations /individuals. The petition will seek directions for effective and time-bound implementation of the earlier decisions of the Supreme Court in the matter, as well as of the recommendations made in the reports of successive Law Commissions and other expert bodies for ensuring the dispensation of speedy, economical and substantial justice.

The Director also apprised the Council of the status of the ongoing cases filed by Common Cause and of the new initiatives in the areas of promotion of communal harmony, minimizing the hazards of harmful drugs and combination drugs, amelioration of the conditions of sewage and conservancy workers, welfare of building and other construction workers, and bringing about greater transparency and accountability in the appointments to constitutional offices and statutory bodies and in allocation of scarce national resources, such as allocation of the spectrum for telecommunications. Endorsing the approach adopted for the pursuit of public causes, the members stressed the importance of building alliances and networks for extending the reach of the Society and expediting the resolution of the issues taken up by it.

It was felt that the issue of administrative reforms may also be included in the thrust areas of Common Cause.  An analysis of the reports of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission and the action taken by the Government on their recommendations may be undertaken for drawing up a programme of action in this regard.  It was also suggested that an analysis may be made of the Public Services Bill, which has been put on the website of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, and an alternative formulation of the framework for a radical transformation of public services in the country may be attempted.

1. **Suggestions for the Annual General Meeting**

No specific suggestions were made in this regard.  The President, however, suggested that meetings of the Governing Council should be held at more frequent intervals, preferably once every quarter, so that greater benefit may be derived from the guidance and counsel of the members.

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

(Vikram Lal)

President