

Hon'ble Justice Swatanter Kumar, &
Hon'ble Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel, former Chairpersons of the
National Green Tribunal,
Hon'ble former and present Judicial and Expert Members of the NGT,
Former and present officers of Registry
office bearers and members of the NGT Bar Association,
staff, media persons and all the dignitaries present here.

A Very Good Evening to all of you!

1. It is a happy occasion when our former chairpersons, former and present members and all those who were or are connected with the NGT are present to take part in the plantation program to commemorate the Foundation Day of the National Green Tribunal.

2. Foundation Day has its significance for any institution. For us, it is a day to reflect upon the journey undertaken by the National Green Tribunal to achieve the objective of environmental protection. It is the day to reappraise the vision and object with which the Tribunal was formed and to examine the efforts that have been made to achieve it and further endeavours which are required to fulfil the aim set out in the enactment. It is the day to honour the past, celebrate the present and envision the future.

3. The seeds of environmental justice were sown in the Stockholm Declaration of 1972. There was rising concern relating to the environment therefore UN General Assembly convened the 1972 Stockholm Conference in Sweden to focus on human interaction

with the environment. At that time, the countries of the world were not united, as environmental governance was not considered an international priority. However, in the Conference, the participating nations agreed on a declaration for the protection of the environment containing 26 principles concerning environment and development. In the Conference, the decision was taken calling upon the participating countries to provide effective access to judicial and executive proceedings including redress and remedy. It was decided to develop national laws regarding liability and compensation for victims of pollution and other environmental damage.

4. India was the third country in the world and the first developing country to establish the specialized Tribunal for addressing environmental issues. The other two countries that had set up specialized environmental Courts earlier were Australia and New Zealand. Keeping in view the Stockholm Declaration, the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 was enacted which is the parent enactment containing the seed of the National Green Tribunal and in terms of the provisions thereon, NGT was established on 18.10.2010.

5. Thus from 18.10.2010, the NGT started its journey of adjudication of cases concerning environmental issues, passing orders and issuing directions on various issues concerning environmental protection. The NGT has contributed immensely to the environmental governance in the Country. It is a specialized

Tribunal to settle the environmental issues. The Tribunal's decisions have contributed to the restoration of degraded environment, prevention of further environmental damage and enforcement of environmental laws. The NGT has played a crucial role in protecting the forest, preventing illegal mining activities, preventing and Control of air pollution and preserving biodiversity. The Tribunal has passed various orders to enforce stringent environmental regulations and ensure that industries and other project proponents comply with the environmental norms. NGT has played a pivotal role in raising public awareness of environmental issues. Be it the protection of river Ganges, Yamuna or other rivers from pollution or protection or management of solid and liquid waste in the local bodies or protection and conservation of forests or prevention of air and water pollution from various sources, the NGT is dedicated to uphold the right to a healthy environment as enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution.

6. The NGT has passed several orders concerning the PAN India issues such as the issues relating to the prevention of pollution in the rivers, demarcation of floodplains of the rivers, prevention of encroachment on the flood plains, solid and liquid waste management in the local bodies, rising sea level, waste management, recycling of plastic waste etc.

7. Every day we receive several complaints in the form of letter petitions from all over the country raising the issues of violation of

environmental norms. After the scrutiny, complaints having substance are treated as letter petitions and examined.

8. NGT is probably the only tribunal that has the *suo motu* power to take up a matter. In *suo motu* exercise of power, the Tribunal has taken up important environmental issues based on newspaper reports and other material. These are larger issues, normally, having PAN India effect.

9. Today, the countries of the world are passing through a crucial phase of environmental degradation and change. There are challenges concerning climate change, global warming, increasing pollution, and loss of biodiversity that need immediate attention. These issues need to be tackled promptly. The NGT is committed to addressing these challenges. We recognize the need for a comprehensive approach to combat these challenges. These challenges have posed a threat to the ecosystem, livelihood and human health. We are also faced with the increasing level of pollution, be it air pollution or water pollution which has far-reaching effects on public health and biodiversity. The Tribunal is taking action against the polluters and ensuring adequate remedial measures.

10. In the last 14 years, our former Chairpersons and Members have immensely contributed to achieving the object of the Act and solved various complicated environmental issues. The NGT is especially grateful to our former Chairpersons, Justice Swatanter Kumar ji and Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel ji for their contribution to

strengthening the institution. The commitment of former and present Judicial and Expert Members to environmental justice has made a significant impact on the environmental upliftment.

11. The advocate body involved in taking up environmental cases has also rendered an effective contribution. Advocates are important stakeholders in this environmental justice system. It is always said that lawyers and judges are two wheels of the chariot of justice. The NGT Bar has a positive role to play in assisting the Tribunal to reach to a proper conclusion on environmental issues and to ensure that environmental justice is done.

12. As we look to the future, our mission is to uphold the right of our citizens to a clean and healthy environment. The NGT is committed to ensuring a lasting impact on the environmental landscape of our nation.

13. For ensuring full compliance of environmental norms the most important factor is awareness. If everybody becomes aware of its duties and responsibilities towards the environment then the environmental courts may not be needed.

14. At this stage, I also take an opportunity to mention the current important environmental issue affecting all of us. Now, the winter has started and newspapers are filled with the news of rising air pollution levels in Delhi. Today's news report says AQI in Delhi has dipped to 285 and it is likely to fall in the very poor category by crossing the 300 mark on Sunday. Contributory factors, such as

burning of *parali*, bursting of crackers, vehicular pollution and prevailing weather conditions are leading to deteriorating air quality. The ambient air quality (AQI) has crossed the threshold limit and Grap-I has been imposed. During the winter season in the previous year, we had witnessed severe air pollution, hence, as conscious citizens all of us have the responsibility to spread awareness about the contributory and mitigating factors concerning air quality. We all must discharge this responsibility with full seriousness to check the dipping air quality.

15. I will conclude with the quote of **William Ruckelshaus** who has very effectively expressed the core issue in one sentence, I quote, "***Nature provides a free lunch, but only if we control our appetites***".

16. Therefore, let us remember our responsibility towards nature and respect and preserve the gift of nature so that we can shape a better tomorrow for our future generations.

Thank you!

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