

TRAINING FOR NON- OFFICIAL VISITORS ON PRISON VISITING SYSTEM

19th and 20th January 2016

Rajasthan Police Academy, Jaipur



COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

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1) Introduction

The Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission (RSHRC) and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) in cooperation with the Rajasthan Prison Department organized a training on Prison Visiting System for the recently appointed 98 Non-Official Visitors (NOVs) in Ajmer, Bharatpur and Jaipur ranges. It was held on 19th & 20th January, 2016 in Jaipur at Auditorium, Rajasthan Police Academy, Panipech, Nehru Nagar.

NOVs are lay people from the community appointed by the government as independent observers and monitors of prisons. They regularly inspect the prison, record their observations in the Visitors Book and report to the government. NOVs along with official visitors form a Board of Visitor in every jail.

2) Objectives

The aim of this workshop was to develop the knowledge, skill and commitment of NOVs who have been appointed after a gap of 2 years.

- Ensuring that the government has a clear picture of issues and challenges arising in jails and can set about improving conditions and preventing any undue harm.
- Greater and better access for members of the public so that they can obtain an insight into jail problems and learn to take an interest in prisons and prisoners.
- Helping the NOVs in placing their work in the larger framework of assisting the prison administration and protecting the human rights of prisoners.
- Early identification of vulnerabilities in prisons and timely redressal of prisoners' grievances and better coordination between NOVs, district and prison administration.

3) Who All Were There?

- Mr. Ajit Singh, Director General (Prison), Rajasthan
- Dr. M.K. Devarajan, Member, Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission
- Mrs. Maja Daruwala, Director, CHRI
- Mr. Dalpat Singh Dinkar, ADG (RSHRC)
- Mr. J.C. Desai, Secretary (RSHRC)
- Mr. R.K. Saxena, Retd. IG, Rajasthan Prisons
- Mr. Shreenath Sharma, Former NOV, Central Jail, Bharatpur
- Ms. Sana Das, Coordinator, CHRI
- Ms. Mrinal Sharma, CHRI

62 NOVs from 12 districts (Ajmer, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Dausa, Dholpur, Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Karauli, Nagaur, Sawai Madhopur, Sikar and Tonk) of Rajasthan attended the workshop.

4) Key Issues Addressed

First Day

- The three-fold role of NOVs in assisting the prison administration, protecting the rights of prisoners and reviewing proposed and existing laws was brought to focus by Mr. Ajit Singh, Mr. R.K. Saxena, Mr. J.C. Desai and Mrs. Maja Daruwala.
- A step by step guide to an effective prison visit was explained to the NOVs beginning with objectives and preparation of a visit, interaction and observation during the visit and action to be taken and follow up after the visit by Mr. R.K. Saxena, Ms. Sana Das and Ms. Mrinal Sharma.

- For practical application of the learning, an exposure visit to Jaipur Central Prison was made by the NOVs.

Second day

- NOVs shared their experience of the exposure visit and prior visits to their own jail with Mr. Ajit Singh, Dr. M.K. Devarajan, Mr. R.K. Saxena and Mrs. Maja Daruwala. Concerns related to presence of fluoride in water, visiting the prison 'at its best' due to roster system, pending constructions and lack of appointment of doctors besides others were echoed by all the NOVs. Mr Ajit Singh patiently heard all their concerns and responded to each of them. He committed to issuing circulars to all the Superintendents for allowing surprise visits by NOVs and assuring their cooperation during the visit. He also assured that he would be advocating for speedy constitution of Board of Visitors with the Home Department, Government of Rajasthan. Dr. M.K. Devarajan assured the NOVs to bring any of their concerns to the Human Rights Commission and pressed upon the importance of the Information Sheets prepared by CHRI comprising contact details of all the necessary stakeholders and functionaries in maintaining prisons.
- The last session chaired by Mrs. Maja Daruwala invited one NOV representative from each district to present on their short term and long term plans and goals towards improving prison conditions. It ended with NOVs making commitments on the accomplishment of which CHRI would be awarding them certificates for completion of training.

5) Achievements

- **Coordination**
It brought three most important actors of prison oversight, viz., NOVs, Prison Department and State Human Rights Commission at one platform which helped alleviating the alienation often felt by civil society when it comes to their role in gaining insight into the world of prisons. It also helped in building their confidence in the functioning of Department and Commission knowing that their visits and observations will find acknowledgment and appropriate action. The commitment of the Prison Department to issue circulars to all the Superintendents directing them to allow surprise visits is indicative of such an acknowledgment.
- **Knowledge**
Currently, due to lack of any set criteria for selecting NOVs, persons from different background and interest are appointed as visitors. In fact, 83% of the NOVs that attended the workshop were appointed for the first time. The training helped them gain perspective on the life of prisoners and prison administration and understand their rights, duties and powers as a visitor to prison.
- **Team Building**
It facilitated communication between NOVs of 12 districts and encouraged team visits. This ensures constant flow of information on good practices and bad practices. Collective commitments were made by the NOVs focusing mainly on ensuring speedy constitution of Board of Visitors, effective legal representation to undertrials, availability of clean drinking water and proper medical services to all prisoners in particular to those suffering from tuberculosis; facilitating prisoner rehabilitation through yoga and recreational activities, restoring family ties and advocating with the MLAs for utilizing the local funds for improving prison conditions.

- **Identification Cards**

Identification cards were issued to the NOVs for ensuring unfettered access to prison and alleviating security concerns.

6) Future Plans

- **Monitoring of Visits**

Monitoring the work of NOVs vis-à-vis recording of proper inspection notes and subsequent improvements.

- **Training of NOVs**

Building the capacities of NOVs in the other 21 districts to ensure improvement all over the state.