



PRESS RELEASE

CHRI's Tribute to Soli Sorabjee, a national and international human rights lawyer and Constitutional legend

New Delhi, April 30 -- The International Board of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), its Executive Committees in India, Africa and the UK and all staff members pay tribute to and express their deepest sympathies and profound condolences on the passing of Soli J. Sorabjee, legal legend, Constitutional expert, upholder of human rights, who served as Attorney-General of India twice, President of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association and UN Special Rapporteur.

In the words of Richard Bourne, CHRI's founder-director, Mr. Sorabjee "played an invaluable role in the early years of the CHRI, in the group which drafted our manifesto 'Put Our World to Rights' prior to the Harare Commonwealth summit in 1991, and in the transfer of the head office from London to New Delhi in 1993... his role as head of the Commonwealth Lawyers' Association and as UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights abuses of the Nigeria military dictatorship, which followed the 1995 CHRI report, 'Nigeria - Stolen by Generals', his Commonwealth and international work will not be forgotten".

Soli Sorabjee later became a member of the United Nations Sub Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and later chairman of the commission from 1998 to 2004. Since 1998, he was a member of the United Nations Sub Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and also served from 2000 to 2006 as a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague.

A votary of the rights of citizens, Soli Sorabjee worked tirelessly for the working and implementation of constitutional law over a remarkable legal career spanning more than 50 years. Hugely respected by his peers and a legend to younger lawyers, Soli Sorabjee's arguments in court helped establish the basis for the expansion of jurisprudence of human rights in many areas. Key cases that he argued included the case against Union Carbide Corporation for the victims of the 1984 gas tragedy, the key need for police reforms in Prakash Singh versus Union of India and judicial review on the limits of Presidential powers on the issue of imposition of President's Rule. He believed in transparency and accountability of governments and in governance and sought to enlarge the scope of the Constitutional court's ambit.

As V. Venkatesh has rightly pointed out, "Sorabjee was convinced that Supreme Court can deduce fundamental rights, even if they are not expressly mentioned. Freedom of the press, right to privacy, right to travel abroad, right to education, freedom from cruel and inhuman punishment or treatment are all such rights which enlarge fundamental rights of our people, and a result of activist judicial approach, he once explained".



In association with jurist Nani Palkhivala and Fali S Nariman, Soli Sorabjee argued the celebrated Keshavanand Bharti case in the Supreme Court that led in 1973 to the legal doctrine of “basic structure” of the Constitution and chaired the committee which drafted the Model Police Act of 2006.

As an individual, Soli Sorabjee was a generous human being, who loved literature and poetry and a jazz aficionado who brought the best of the blues to Indiathrough a long-running Jazz Festival. CHRI honours his deep and abiding commitment to constitutionalism and human rights, for his upholding of the law and his friendships which transcended politics. We remember his laughter, swiftness of repartee and his leadership of the India International Centre, a key intellectual and cultural space in the country.

He shall be missed deeply for this was a life that enriched all who met him.

Wajahat Habibullah, Chairperson of the India Executive Board of CHRI on behalf of the EC

Alison Duxbury, Chairperson of the International Board

Sanjoy Hazarika, International Director CHRI and Director of the India Office

Maja Daruwala, former Director CHRI

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