

CNLU LEGAL AID CELL ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

"The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen because of economic or other disabilities."

- Article 39-A of the Constitution of India."

The following are the activities of the Legal Aid Cell during the Academic Year 2023-2024

23. 11.2023: Visit To Beur Jail

On 23 November 2023 members of the CNLU legal aid cell had a visit to Beur jail with the permission of the Inspector General (Prison), Bihar. Upon visit, the members were attended by the Assistant Superintendent of Beur jail and they had an in-depth discussion regarding the status of under-trial prisoners, on their condition in jails, and reports on data of prisoners were sought by us.

Objectives:

The most important objective of the visit was to ensure whether the fundamental rights of under-trial prisoners are being protected or whether are they rotting in jail for no reason. To analyze whether the conditions and facilities that were provided to these prisoners were at par with the established standards or not was another objective.

Outcomes:

The students witnessed the conditions of the under-trial prisoners in the Beur jail and were motivated to fight for the cause of justice in their respective cases. The students interacted and questioned officers of the jail with regards to the steps they take and methods they employ to ensure that the prisoners are kept in a healthy condition and that the directions of the Courts about the welfare and protection of these prisoners are executed.



23.01.2024: Collaboration for Legal Aid: CNLU Initiative with Bihar State Legal Services Authority

Objective:

On January 23, 2024, members of the CNLU Legal Aid Cell initiated discussions with the Bihar State Legal Service Authority (BSLSA) to undertake a project focusing on undertrial prisoners in Bihar. The objective was to gather comprehensive information about the condition of undertrial prisoners, the rate of case disposal, and the extent of legal assistance provided to indigent prisoners by the legal services authority.

During the meeting, CNLU students engaged in a detailed discussion with Miss Shilpee Sonoraj, District & Session Judge, and Mrs. Dhriti Jasmeen Sharma, Member Secretary of BSLSA and Additional District Judge. The students sought extensive information regarding the status of undertrial prisoners in Bihar, including case disposal rates and the efforts made by the legal services authority to assist indigent prisoners.

The authority representatives from BSLSA responded positively to the CNLU Legal Aid Cell's initiative and expressed their willingness to support the project. They assured the students of their commitment to providing all possible assistance from their end.

Outcome:

The meeting concluded with a promising collaboration between CNLU Legal Aid Cell and BSLSA to address the challenges faced by undertrial prisoners in Bihar. The exchange of information and commitment from BSLSA signifies a step forward in efforts to improve the legal aid services and support mechanisms available to indigent prisoners in the state. This collaboration holds the potential to bring about positive changes in the legal landscape and contribute to ensuring justice for underprivileged individuals in Bihar.



06.02.2024: Promoting Legal Awareness: Guest Lecture on the Role of Law Students in Lok Adalat

On February 6, 2024, the Legal Aid Cell of Chanakya National Law University (CNLU), in collaboration with the Bihar State Legal Services Authority (BSLSA), organized a guest lecture on “*The Role of Law Students in Lok Adalat*.” The objective was to educate CNLU students about their potential contributions to the Lok Adalat system and foster their understanding of legal aid principles.

The event featured Ms. Shilpee Soniraj, a District and Session Judge, and Member Secretary of the Bihar Legal Services Authority, Patna, as the esteemed speaker. Notable attendees included Dhristi Jasleen Sharma, Joint Secretary of BALS (Legal Aid Cell), and Ms. Neha Niharika, Assistant Registrar at BALS.

The presentation of the theme song of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) provided context to the session, outlining its objectives and principles related to legal aid. Ms. Shilpee Soniraj led an interactive session, discussing topics such as the genesis of Lok Adalat, the significance of legal literacy for marginalized communities, and the role of law students in promoting access to justice. She emphasized constitutional provisions related to legal aid, drawing inspiration from the preamble of the Constitution.

Outcome:

The guest lecture provided CNLU students with valuable insights into their potential role in promoting access to justice through Lok Adalat. Attendees gained a deeper understanding of legal aid principles and the importance of legal literacy for marginalized communities. The session served as a platform for meaningful discussions and inspired students to actively contribute to legal empowerment initiatives. Overall, the event facilitated collaboration between CNLU and BSLSA in promoting legal awareness and empowering future legal professionals.



19.02.2024: CNLU Legal Aid Cell's Engagement with Bihar Prison

Authorities

Objective:

On February 19, 2024, members of the CNLU Legal Aid Cell undertook a visit to the old secretariat to meet with the Inspector General (Prison), Bihar. The primary objective was to submit an application seeking data on under-trial prisoners in Bihar and to discuss the current status of case backlog and disposal in the state. Additionally, the students aimed to discuss their previous visit to Beur Central Jail and engage with probation officers regarding the status of under-trial prisoners.

During the visit, CNLU Legal Aid Cell members met with the Inspector General (Prison), Bihar, to hand over an application requesting data on under-trial prisoners and information regarding case backlog and disposal. They also discussed their previous visit to Beur Central Jail to gain insights into the conditions and challenges faced by prisoners.

Furthermore, the students engaged in discussions with probation officers to understand the status of under-trial prisoners and explore potential avenues for legal assistance and support.

Outcome:

The engagement with Bihar prison authorities provided CNLU Legal Aid Cell members with valuable information and insights into the state of under-trial prisoners and the judicial system's efficiency in Bihar. By submitting the application and discussing their observations from previous visits, the students demonstrated their commitment to advocating for justice and improving conditions for incarcerated individuals. The discussions with probation officers also offered opportunities to explore ways to provide legal aid and support to under-trial prisoners, ultimately contributing to efforts to ensure fair and timely justice delivery in the state.



06.10.2023 to 08.10.2024: VIDHIKTA 2.0

Legal Aid Cell organised the second edition of its flagship event, Vidhikta 2.0 which aims to target all those who belong to the legal fraternity. Vidhikta is the confluence of two words 'Vidhik' and 'Sahayta'. 'Vidhik Shayata' or legal aid is the act of assisting those people who need legal recourse but are dampened by financial constraints. Access to legal aid is essential for ensuring equal justice. As being part of this noble profession, the main aim of every law student should be to offer a helping hand to those who are not aware of their rights and are often oppressed. Vidhikta 2.0 gave a platform to redefine legal aid. It acted as a platform to express, innovate and gain knowledge through jam-packed events with marvelous rewards and additional perks.

Legal Aid Cell successfully collaborated with BSLSA, SAMA, CARCIL-CNLU, CCADR-CNLU, Bleeding Blues (NGO) and Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services) to organize the following events -

- Mock Lok Adalat Competition
- National Client Counselling Competition
- Nukkad Natak Competition
- Quiz Competition
- PIL Drafting Competition
- Contract Drafting Competition

The fest witnessed the presence of eminent legal personalities to judge the offline competition. The panel included the resource person from the Judicial Academy, BSLSA, Ms. Sangeeta Mehrotra (ADR Professional), Mr. Ambuj Sonal (Partner, Dentons Link Legal), Ms. Seema Partha Sarthi (ADR Professional), among others.

The winners of the events were rewarded with cash prizes and Internship opportunities at Chandiok & Mahajan, Nishith Desai Associates and Dentons Link Legal.

The event was conducted successfully and was concluded with an enlightening Valedictory Ceremony which summed up the spirit of the event and the idea of legal aid. The ceremony was enlivened by the auspicious presence of the Chief Guest of the event Hon'ble Justice Mr. V. Gopala Gowda, Former Judge of the Supreme Court of India and Former Chief Justice of the Odisha High Court.

Mock Lok-Adalat Competition

Lok Adalat is one of the alternative dispute redressal mechanisms, it is a forum where disputes/ cases pending in the court of law or at the pre-litigation stage are settled/ compromised amicably. The Mock Lok Adalat Competition will provide an opportunity for the participants to engage in mock Lok Adalat sessions, where they can understand the practicality of Alternative Dispute Resolution practices, such as Lok Adalat, as an essential component of the legal profession.

Winners: Shri Vijay Lakshmi and Mini Sinha (Central University of South Bihar, Gaya).

National Client Counselling Competition

National Client Counselling Competition aims to promote greater skill, knowledge, and interest among law students in the preventative law and counselling functions of law practice. It will help the participants to develop interviewing, planning, and analytical skills in the lawyer-client relationship in the law office. The Competition will provide a platform for a valuable educational and cultural interchange between students, law teachers, and legal practitioners. This competition aims at enhancing skills relating to the initial interview with a person playing the role of the client, addressing the client's legal and non-legal needs, the advocate-client relationship, building rapport, determining client goals, considering applicable law, etc.

Winners: Anushka Tyagi and Charvi Sahay (Maharashtra National Law University, Aurangabad).

Nukkad Natak Competition

Nukkad Natak or Street play is an ancient form of Indian Art that aims at communicating social messages about the important issues of public discourse, through a medium of entertainment and art. This competition aims to effectively work as a tool for spreading awareness on important social issues. This activity will help to instill amongst the students a sensitive approach towards various social issues and will also sensitize people through a creative presentation of such issues. We invite the students, NGOs, Social workers, Teachers, Academicians, etc., to demonstrate their art, creativity, wittiness, and team spirit and convey a strong social message through a powerful play/skit.

Winner: Team Creator's Group (A.N. College, Patna).

Quiz Competition

The quiz competition is designed to assess and elevate students' legal knowledge. Our primary goal is to foster a profound comprehension of how the law influences society. Participants shall get the opportunity to engage in healthy competition, share insights, and discuss legal nuances with fellow participants, all while expanding their network and building valuable relationships within the legal community.

This quiz has been meticulously curated to include a diverse range of questions encompassing various facets of the law; questions will be asked from the area of Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, Public Interest Litigation, Right to Information Act, Human Rights, Consumer Protection Act, Rights of the Victim, Alternative Dispute Resolution. The quiz will feature varied patterns of questions such as fundamental legal concepts, landmark cases, and societal issues, enabling greater critical thinking and analytical skill.

Winner: Swarnim Tripathi (Lloyd School of Law, Greater Noida).

PIL Drafting Competition

Public Interest Litigation (“PIL”) is legal action taken by an individual citizen or a group of individual citizens on behalf of a section of the public, such as disadvantaged groups and minorities, or the public in general. PIL is a mechanism of using the law deliberately to effect social change. The aim of the competition is to inculcate the vigour and virtue of standing up for what's just and fair, to raise not only their voice but also to put their critical thoughts on paper, to develop and manifest their writing skills and make their words worthy of holding up their cause in the court of law.

Winner: Pujarani Behera (National Law University, Odisha).

Contract Drafting Competition

The competition aims to provide a platform for law students to demonstrate their legal expertise in drafting contracts and to apply their legal knowledge to practical situations and gain a deeper understanding of the legal implications of contract drafting. This competition will help to promote the importance of contract drafting in the legal profession and highlight the skills needed to excel in this area.

Winners: Priyam Soni and Shambhavi Anand (National Law Institute University, Bhopal).



09.03.2024: LECTURE SERIES- SARV JAN HITAY

The Legal Aid cell of Chanakya National Law University conducted a guest lecture on “*The Indian Judicial Approach on Enforcement of Human Rights and the Contemporary Challenges*” by Dr. Collin Golsalves, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India on March 9th, 2024.

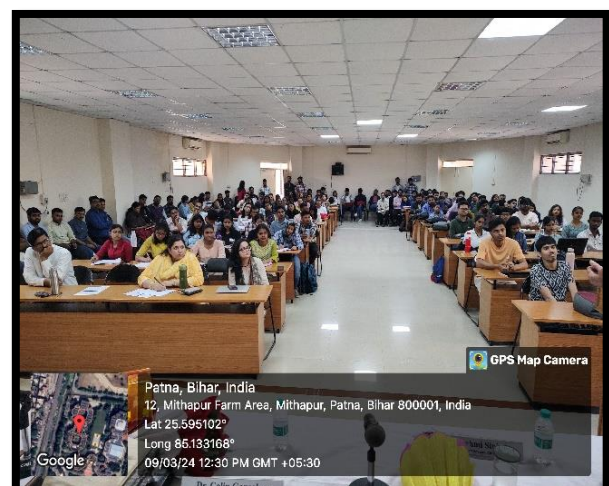
About the Speaker

Dr. Gonsalves is amongst the most versatile and innovative human rights lawyers of his generation, fighting for the rights and well-being of India’s most vulnerable populations. He is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India and the founder of the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), an Indian national network of public interest lawyers. Over three decades, HRLN’s lawyers have engaged in public interest litigation to hold the government to account and secure a broad spectrum of human rights.

About the Session

The session focused on securing rights for India’s most vulnerable people, such as bonded labourers, ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, slum dwellers, women and the poor.

Dr. Colin Gonsalves highlighted his significant role in addressing human rights violations, particularly focusing on the Right to Food. He emphasized the judiciary's crucial role in safeguarding human rights, citing examples such as the Israel-Hamas Conflict and recent remarks by the Chief Justice of India regarding bail and jail rules. Dr. Gonsalves criticized the draconian provisions like the UAPA, leading to convictions based on sedition and hate speeches, citing cases like Sudha Bharadwaj's arrest in the Bhima Koregaon Case. He discussed the evolving stance of the judiciary and media on human rights issues, citing notable judgments in cases like abortion rights, Chardham case, and slum demolition. The session concluded with an interactive Q&A where Dr. Gonsalves addressed audience queries.



10.03.2024: SEMINAR ON HATE SPEECH & HATE CRIMES

On 10th March 2024, The CNLU Legal Aid Cell was invited, by PUCL, Bihar to the seminar on “*Hate Speech & Hate Crimes: Our Responsibilities*” held at Gandhi Sanghralaya, Patna. The seminar also featured Padma Shree awardee Sudha Varghese, a social activist often referred to as the ‘Mother Teresa of Bihar,’ adding prestige to the event.

The convener of the Cell, Digvijay Patel familiarised the audience with elements of hate speech and how to curb it, challenges raised by online hate speech, and the link between violence and hate speech. In Furtherance of the Aim, he also informed about the practical differences between hate speech, defamation, and sedition. The Attendees were given first-hand insight into the procedural aspects of law related to Hate speech.

During the seminar, various aspects of hate speech and hate crimes were discussed by other senior members, including their impact on society, legal implications, and the responsibilities of individuals and institutions in addressing and preventing them. The presence of such esteemed speakers as Shaswat Srivastava, co-founder of Janman People's Foundation & Advocate in Patna High Court, and the focus on such crucial topics made the seminar a valuable and insightful experience for all attendees.

