

**SPEECH OF HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE IN FULL COURT
REFERENCE TO CONDOLE THE SAD DEMISE OF JUSTICE J. S.
VERMA, FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA**

My brother and sister judges, Mr. A.S. Chandhiok, Learned Additional Solicitor General of India and the President of the Delhi High Court Bar Association, Mr. Rajeev Mehra, learned ASG, High Court of Delhi, Mr. J.P. Sengh, Vice-President of the Delhi High Court Bar Association, Mr. Mohit Mathur, Secretary, Delhi High Court Bar Association, Executive Members of the Delhi High Court Bar Association, Mr. R.S. Goswami, Chairman, Bar Council of Delhi, Mr. Murari Tiwari, Secretary, Bar Council of Delhi, Additional Standing Counsel, Govt. of NCT of Delhi, learned members of the Bar, members of the bereaved family, ladies and gentlemen.

We have assembled here today to express our profound sense of sorrow on the sad demise of Justice J. S. Verma, the former Chief Justice of India. Justice Verma breathed his last on 22nd April, 2013 and he is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Born on 18th January, 1933, Justice Verma began his legal career as a pleader at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh and

later as a junior to lawyer G.P. Singh. He practiced constitutional, civil, criminal, taxation and revenue matters. He was appointed as permanent judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on 2.6.1973 and made its Chief Justice on 14.6.1986. He was later transferred as Chief Justice to the Rajasthan High Court on 1.9.1986 before being appointed as judge of the Supreme Court on 3.6.1989. He became the 27th Chief Justice of India on 25.3.1997 and demitted office on 18.1.1998. In his judicial career spanning well over two decades, he set very high standards of integrity earning him a name as the judiciary's conscience keeper. He lived his life the same manner he conducted himself in public office, with propriety and uprightness. He maintained absolute integrity, punctuality and promptness throughout his career. Above all, he maintained honesty in his judicial function.

I myself have had the occasion to interact with Justice Verma last year at an *International Conference on Transparency and Accountability* and was happy to see that despite his advanced age he still possessed the same spirit

and vigour for improving the system and bringing about good governance.

Of his many landmark judgments, a few deserve special mention. In the Vishaka case, having regard for international conventions to help construe domestic law and the growing menace of sexual harassment in the workplace, Justice Verma gave the country a series of guidelines to deal with such a persistent problem till a suitable legislation was enacted. In the Jain Hawala case, he guaranteed the functional autonomy of the CBI effectively snubbing political interference and invented “continuing mandamus” for constant court monitoring of CBI and police investigations. In the Second All India Judges case, he ensured independence of the judiciary by leaving the finality in appointment of judges to a collegium comprising of High Court and Supreme Court judges for the respective courts. In the Nilabati Behra case, he placed strict liability on the state and allowed compensation for any contravention of human rights the protection of which is guaranteed by the Constitution.

His integrity was further on display when he refused all assignments of profit post retirement. As only former Chief Justices of India could occupy the position, he was appointed Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission where his short tenure from 1999 till 2003 has been described by many as the golden age of the Commission. As Chairman, he dealt with the rehabilitation of people in the aftermath of the Orissa cyclone. He expanded the scope of human rights to include public health and social security. And through his sustained interventions in the Gujarat riots of 2002, he compelled the Supreme Court to re-examine several cases, appoint investigators and prosecutors to guarantee justice to the victims of the riots.

Justice Verma chaired several other important commissions and bodies, notable among them being the News Broadcasting Standards Authority, the Commission on Security Lapses and the Commission on Rape Laws. Heading the Commission set up to determine the nature of security lapses leading to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the report was completed and submitted in record time. A

similar feat was achieved this year when he headed a three member committee constituted to recommend amendments to criminal law. The commission submitted its voluminous 630 page report in just 29 days. This report makes several key suggestions for enhanced punishment of criminals accused of committing sexual assault, for quicker trial and for introduction and punishment of other sexual offences against women. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code and all round reforms among the police, the politicians and armed forces were also recommended.

We all present here, expressly convey our heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved family and pray to God to give them strength to bear this irrecoverable loss. May almighty bestow peace to the departed soul.

(AFTER REFERENCE BY LAWYERS IS OVER)

I request you all to pay homage by standing in silence for two minutes in the memory of late Justice J.S. Verma.

(The Hon'ble Judges will take their respective seats for a moment after the silence, and it will be announced by Hon'ble the Chief Justice as under).

“As a mark of respect to the departed soul, the Court is adjourned for the rest of the day”.