

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Day 1 of National Annual Stakeholders Consultation on Ten Years of Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 Concludes at Supreme Court of India

“For Ten Years We Have Counted Cases; For the Next Ten, Let Us Count Lives Rebuilt”: Hon’ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, Chief Justice of India Inaugurates Two-Day National Consultation

Hon’ble the Chief Justice of India Releases Landmark Judicial e-Compendium; Urges Dedicated Defence Wings for Children and Inter-Agency Training

“When a Child Breaks the Law, the Law Must Not Break the Child”: Hon’ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna Delivers Opening Remarks Emphasizing De-Institutionalization, Pendency Reduction, and Longitudinal State Reviews

New Delhi, 10 October, 2026

The Juvenile Justice Committee of the Supreme Court of India, in association with UNICEF India, convened the opening day of the two-day National Annual Stakeholders Consultation on **"Ten Years of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015: Progress, Challenges and Priorities for the Next Decade"** today, October 10, 2026, at the Auditorium, C-Block, Administrative Buildings Complex, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi.

The national consultation brought together Judges of the Supreme Court of India and High Courts, Directors of State Judicial Academies, Secretaries of Women and Child Development departments, Members of Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), child-protection specialists, legal academics, and civil society representatives to undertake an evidence-based institutional audit of the Act’s first decade of implementation.

During the inaugural session, in her opening remarks **Hon’ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna**, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Chairperson, Juvenile Justice Committee, observed the core philosophy of juvenile jurisprudence, that ***“when a child breaks the law, the law must not break the child”***:

Hon’ble Mrs. Justice B. V. Nagarathna highlighted the statutory anchors of Section 3 including the presumption of innocence, non-stigmatising semantics, and institutionalisation as a measure of last resort, reaffirming that JJBs are not miniature criminal courts.

Citing the India Justice Report (November 2025), Her Ladyship highlighted that 55% of cases before JJBs across 18 States and two UTs were pending by late 2023, with over 55,000 children awaiting decisions and 24% of responding

Boards operating without a full bench. She underscored that a disposed case does not automatically equate to a rehabilitated child unless supported by individualized, holistic care plans.

Her Ladyship commended the annual data submissions compiled by High Court Juvenile Justice Committees and State Governments since 2023, observing that longitudinal data provides the precise empirical baseline needed to scale successful local practices across the nation.

The Introductory remarks were delivered by **Ms. Cynthia McCaffrey**, Country Representative, UNICEF India, who reaffirmed UNICEF's partnership with the Indian judiciary to secure child-friendly procedures, divert young people from formal penal processes, and build protective community environments.

Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India formally released an e-Compendium of Landmark Judgments of the Supreme Court of India and High Courts relating to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, capturing jurisprudential developments spanning from 2015 to September 2026.

In the Inaugural Address, **Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India** observed that ten years represents more than half of a childhood, emphasizing that the phrase ***"child in conflict with law"*** describes a circumstance, not an identity.

Underlining the constitutional philosophy embedded in Articles 15(3) and 39 of the Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Hon'ble the Chief Justice India highlighted that the Act's response must remain restorative rather than retributive, treating institutional confinement as a strict last resort.

Observing that many JJBs still lack legal aid clinics under NALSA's Child-Friendly Legal Services Scheme, 2024, Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India urged Legal Services Institutions to create a dedicated cadre/wing of specialized defence counsel for children to represent them continuously from apprehension at the police station through final orders and rehabilitation.

Calling for joint inter-agency training across Judicial and Police Academies alongside psychologists, His Lordship noted that front-line actors must not be trained in separate silos. He also stressed the urgent need to fill vacancies of Probation Officers to ensure comprehensive Social Investigation Reports.

His Lordship called for the timely expungement/destruction of records, strict digital privacy to protect children from lifelong stigma, and independent empirical evaluations that track how many children successfully return to school and stable livelihoods.

Following the Inaugural Session, the Day progressed with the technical sessions, graced by Eminent speakers and followed by interactive sessions with the participants.

Rights of Children in Conflict with Law & Preliminary Assessments

Chaired by **Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.B. Pardiwala**, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Member, Juvenile Justice Committee, the first technical session deliberated upon substantive and procedural safeguards for children in conflict with law:

Preliminary Assessment under Section 15: Professor (Dr.) Srikrishna Deva Rao, Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, examined the procedural standards, psycho-social evaluations, and developmental nuances governing the preliminary assessment of 16-to-18-year-olds in alleged heinous offences.

Safeguarding Rights and Minimizing Detention: Ms. Swagata Raha, Director – Research, Enfold Proactive Health Trust, and **Ms. Sharmila Ray**, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF India, addressed frontline procedural compliance, diversion mechanisms, and systemic measures to eliminate unnecessary confinement.

Children in Need of Care and Protection with Special Reference to Adoption

Chaired by **Hon'ble Mr. Justice A.S. Chandurkar**, Judge, Supreme Court of India and Member, Juvenile Justice Committee, the second session reviewed child protection machinery and non-institutional alternative care:

Adoption Landscape and Administrative Bottlenecks: Ms. Bhavna Saxena, IPS, Member Secretary & CEO, Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), provided an operational overview of domestic adoption trends, administrative timelines, and efforts to expedite declarations of children legally free for adoption.

Inter-Country Adoption Frameworks: Mr. Anil Malhotra, Senior Advocate, analyzed regulatory compliance, judicial processes, and private international law interfaces under the Act and statutory regulations.

Family-Based Care vs. Institutionalization: Dr. Sheema Sengupta, UNICEF Global Director of Child Protection, delivered international comparative perspectives illustrating global evidentiary shifts favoring foster care and family preservation over institutional placements.

State-Wise Implementation and Best Practices

The afternoon technical session evaluated regional implementations across six States and Union Territories, chaired by **Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sujit Narayan Prasad**, Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Jharkhand, and co-chaired by **Hon'ble Justice Moushumi Bhattacharya**, Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court for the State of Telangana. The Dignitaries on the dais included representative from the following states:

Tamil Nadu: Presented by Hon'ble Dr. Justice G. Jayachandran (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, Madras High Court) and Ms. M. Pallavi Baldev, IAS (Secretary, Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department).

Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh: Presented by Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Sindhu Sharma (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh).

Delhi: Presented by Hon'ble Ms. Justice Jyoti Singh (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Delhi) and Dr. Rashmi Singh, IAS (Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, GNCTD).

Gujarat: Presented by Hon'ble Ms. Justice Sangeeta K. Vishen (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Gujarat) and Mr. Harshad R. Patel, IAS (Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment).

Odisha: Presented by Hon'ble Ms. Justice Savitri Ratho (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Orissa) and Dr. Mrinalini Darwal, IAS (Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development).

Uttarakhand: Presented by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Rakesh Thapliyal (Judge & Chairperson, JJC, High Court of Uttarakhand) and Mr. Chandresh Kumar Yadav, IAS (Secretary, Department of Women Empowerment & Child Development).

Link to view the Inaugural Session:

https://youtube.com/live/UKaGYpXWc_s?feature=share

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