




National Legal Aid Day


28 April 2014

National Legal Aid Services Organization
Law & Justice Division
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs



President
People's Republic of Bangladesh
Dhaka

15 Baishakh 1421
28 April 2014



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It gives me immense pleasure to learn that, Law and Justice Division of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs is going to hold 'National Legal Aid Day 2014' in Dhaka with a view to providing legal aid to the helpless, poor and underprivileged people of the country.

One of the basic responsibilities of a civilized democratic state is to ensure the legal protection of all citizens. According to Article 27 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law". In this context, poverty cannot be a barrier in getting justice. In spite of such mentions stated in the Constitution, too many people remain deprived of legal protection because of financial crisis and social disparity. Keeping that in mind the present Government passed the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 during its previous tenure to reach legal aid at the doorsteps of the financially insolvent and destitute people. Every day, under the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 a huge number of helpless, poor and disadvantaged people are receiving Government legal aid services. As a result of sincere efforts of the government, the legal aid service has spread massively across the country, in the Districts, Upazilas, Unions as well as in the Supreme Court.

In the past five years, progress in the Government's legal services has immensely contributed to the socio-economic development of the country. I heartily appreciate and congratulate the judges, lawyers, NGO workers, human rights activists as well as District, Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committees on their extraordinary contribution for the expansion of the Government's legal aid services. On this day it is my expectation that more destitute people of the country would receive government legal aid.

I wish all-out success of all programmes undertaken on the occasion of the 'National Legal Aid Day 2014'.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.



Md. Abdul Hamid

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An Overview of Government Legal Aid Programme

The Government of Bangladesh has enacted Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 with a view to providing legal aid to the poor and underprivileged. The Government established National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) to implement the Government legal aid programme. Under the chair of District & Session Judge, District Legal Aid Committee has been formed in each district. Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committee have also been formed at local level. The Government, with its own fund, is providing legal aid to the poor litigants who are incapable of seeking justice due to financial insolvency, destitution, helplessness and for various socio-economic conditions through District, Upazila & Union Legal Aid Committee.

Government Legal Aid Services

- Legal Advice
- Free *Vocalatnama*
- Provide Advocate to help in a legal proceeding
- Provide fees for the lawyers
- Provide fees for the mediator or arbitrator
- Supply copies of Order, Judgement etc. with free of cost
- Provide the cost of DNA Test
- Provide the cost of paper advertisement in Criminal Case
- Any other relevant assistance or cost needed for a case

Government Legal Aid Service: 4 Years of Progress and Development

Despite constitutional rights guaranteeing every citizen equal rights before the law irrespective of poor or affluent, a large number of people remain deprived of justice because of financial constraints. The marginalized and underprivileged sections of the society often become victims of social injustice. The National Legal Aid Services Organization of Government of Bangladesh, in an effort to mitigate such hardships of the poor litigants, has introduced legal aid office in all districts. The legal aid offices are responsible to provide free legal services and advices to poor and helpless people. This has been a major achievement of the present Government of Bangladesh over the last four years. Let us take a look at some of the major tasks the NLASO has accomplished to ensure justice is duly served to the poor people.

Setting up National Legal Aid Services Organization

To make Government legal aid services instrumental, the present Government established the National Legal Aid Services Organization in 2000. Despite being established as statutory organization, the previous government did not make it functional. Due to lack of human resources and office, the Government's legal aid services have been tremendously hindered. The present Government after assuming power has made the organization instrumental at delivering legal aid services to the poor and helpless people. The Government has appointed staffs, set up offices and other infrastructures to make the organization effective and functional.

Law and Policy Amendment

In order to make the Government legal aid services more effective, expeditious and pro-poor, amendments have been brought to the laws and policies related to legal aid. Through the enactment of Legal Aid Services (Amendment) Act, 2011, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Pouroshabha Mayor and Upazila Chairman have been enlisted as members of the District committee. Also, to make Government legal aid services more accessible to the poor people, amendments have been brought even to the Legal Aid Services Regulation, 2001 by which an 'insolvent person's income limit has been increased from BDT 30,000 to BDT 50,000 and for freedom fighters from BDT 6,000 to BDT 75,000.

Increasing Fee for Panel Lawyers

To attract skilled and experienced lawyers to deal with cases pertaining to legal aid services, the government has increased fees by manifold by amending the Legal Aid Services Regulation, 2001. The increment of fees has created a great deal of job motivation among the panel of lawyers.

Establishment of Permanent District Legal Aid Offices

Legal Aid Offices have been set up in 64 districts to make the legal aid services more effective, expeditious and service-oriented. Position of three staffs including an official with the status of a Senior Assistant Judge has been created in each of the 64 districts with total of 192 positions. All arrangements including appointment of human resources and procurement of office furniture have been allotted for District Legal Aid Office. Through these initiatives the Government legal aid service has shaped into an institution. A District legal aid officer, besides providing legal aid services to the poor and helpless litigants, also provides people with legal advices. Currently, disposal of cases, referred by the Court or Tribunal, through district legal aid officer, is in the government's consideration.

Setting up Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committee

In order to reach the Government legal aid services in the grassroots across the country, the Government has taken initiative to form Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committee by formulating National Legal Aid Services Organization (Formation of Upazila and Union Committee, Duties & Functions etc.) Regulation, 2011. Legal aid committees have been set up across the country in light of the regulation. A workshop on legal aid services has been completed in every district in presence of the Upazila and Union chairmen.

Introducing Hotline Services

In order to provide primary information on legal aid, the NLASO stated a hotline service with three cell numbers (0176122222-4) at its head office. Under the service, anyone can get necessary information about legal aid service and its procedure through a phone call from any part of the country. Primary legal advice is also given to the callers in addition to the information.

Launching Website

A website has been opened to introduce NLASO as well as provide information about different services that the organization provides. The website is designed with volume of information so that people can learn about Government legal aid from anywhere in the world. The website: www.nlaso.gov.bd contains application form for legal aid services, other forms and registers, phone numbers of legal aid offices in 64 districts and all the other procedural information.

Production of TVC

An attractive TVC has been produced for public awareness to be broadcast in public and private radio and television channels. The TVC is currently being telecast on various radio and TV channels besides BTv. A large number of people are calling the hotline numbers after watching the TVC to get more information about legal aid.

Optimum Utilization of Legal Aid Fund


In four years of the present Government's tenure, because of a rapid progress in the legal aid services, cost for the services rendered to the poor people out of the fund allotted for them has increased manifold. The utilization of the fund before 2009 was below 10%, which had increased to 72% in 2009, 86% in 2010, 98% in 2011, 100% in 2012 and 100% in 2013.

Prepare Strategic Plans of the Organization

The National Legal Aid Services Organization has prepared a five-year work-plan (2012-2017) on the basis of priorities of implementing and finalizing them.


Setting up Legal Aid Cell for Workers

National Legal Aid Services Organization has set up a Legal Aid Cell at the Labour Court building premises with a view to providing legal support to the poor and impoverished workers. The Cell provides all types of legal assistance such as legal advice, filing and conducting cases and mediation.



Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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I am happy to learn that, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry is going to observe 'National Legal Aid Day' on 28 April 2014.

Access to justice is a constitutional right of every citizen of the state. The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in Article 19 (1) says, 'The state shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens' as a fundamental principle of state policy. As a part of the responsibility, our government enacted the 'Legal Aid Services Act' in 2000.

Under this Act, the Government has been funding to provide legal aid services to litigants who are incapable of seeking justice due to financial insolvency, destitution, helplessness and for various socio-economic constraints.

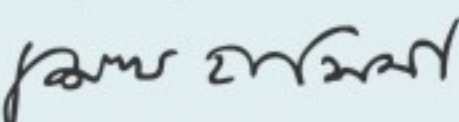
Our government has taken significant initiatives to reform the Legal Aid Service Programmes for the welfare of insolvent, poor and disadvantaged people. With utmost sincerity, the Government has established permanent Legal Aid Offices in every district and formed Legal Aid Committees in the districts, upazilas and union level as well as at the Supreme Court. Besides providing legal services, the offices also give free legal advice to the poor to keep a positive impact on the society. In addition, initiative has also been taken to solve cases and disputes through Alternative Dispute Resolution by Legal Aid Offices.

The Government Legal Aid Programme has been spread widely owing to firm commitment and sincere efforts of the present Government. As a result, the number of legal aid seekers is increasing every year as the legal aid cases for the poor litigants are being disposed of speedily.

I believe the international organizations, private agencies, civil society, media, bar council and bar association will play a key role in increasing outreach of the legal aid for public welfare.

I wish the 'National Legal Aid Day 2014' a grand success.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.



Sheikh Hasina



Minister
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Rule of law and justice is the main pillar of any civilized state. Justice and universal human rights get utmost importance in articles 27, 31 and 33 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law. The government enacted Legal Aid Services Act 2000 and formed statutory body called National Legal Aid Services Organization aimed at providing legal aid to destitute, poor and helpless people to successfully meet the messages of the Constitution. The District, Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committees under the National Legal Aid Services Organization have been providing legal support to poor people at Government's expense. The present Government has already established permanent Legal Aid Officers in 64 districts to make the Government Legal Aid Programmes more efficient, swift and service-oriented. A judge, appointed in every Legal Aid Office, has been providing all kinds of legal advice and services to the poor and helpless people. To reduce case backlogs from the judiciary the Government is determined to make the best use of District Legal Aid Offices. The Government is thinking to dispose of cases through mediation with the help of District Legal Aid Officers. The present Government, besides enhancing the District committee, also established Upazila and Union Legal Aid Committees, after taking responsibility. The Act has been made more comprehensive and fees for the panel of lawyers have been increased. It is needless to say that our government is committed to ensuring quality legal services. The measures stated above are steps towards fulfilling our intended purpose.

I believe the present efforts combined with the support from the public and private sector, welfare organizations, lawyers, judges, influential citizens and representatives of the people will help us achieve our desired goal.

I wish success for the 'National Legal Aid Day-2014'




Anisul Huq, M.P.



Resident Representative
UNDP, Bangladesh

15 Baishakh 1421
28 April 2014



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On behalf of the United Nations, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and the National Legal Aid Services Organization for celebrating for the 2nd consecutive year the Bangladesh National Legal Aid Day.

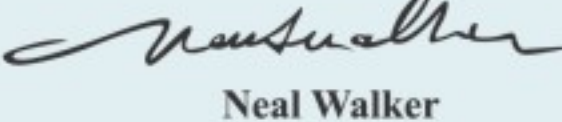
Nowadays, the right to legal aid is widely recognized as fundamental human right and a necessary guarantee to ensure that due processes and fair trial are respected. Legal aid also plays a crucial role in promoting access to justice, legal empowerment, poverty eradication and human development.

By recognizing that certain groups are more vulnerable and therefore entitled to additional legal protection whenever they come into contact with the law, the Bangladesh National Legal Aid Service is laying the foundation for promoting a more responsive, effective and accountable national dialogue on policy and legislative reforms aimed at overcoming barriers which prevent particularly poor litigants from accessing legal rights and seeking legal redress.

Low paid workers are still struggling to enjoy decent standards of living. Thousands of female labourers are still deprived of their basic labour rights, including maternity benefit-related entitlements.

Once again, I wish to reiterate the commitment of UNDP to support realization of people's rights. We pledge to increase our efforts in the justice sector, to enhance legal awareness, sensitize the public and maximize legal aid services and accessibility across the country.

We shall continue to work together, the UN, the Government, donors, justice stakeholders and civil society organizations towards our responsibilities to protect the most marginalized and destitute and promote the fulfilment of the rights set out in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.



Neal Walker



Secretary (In-charge)
Law and Justice Division
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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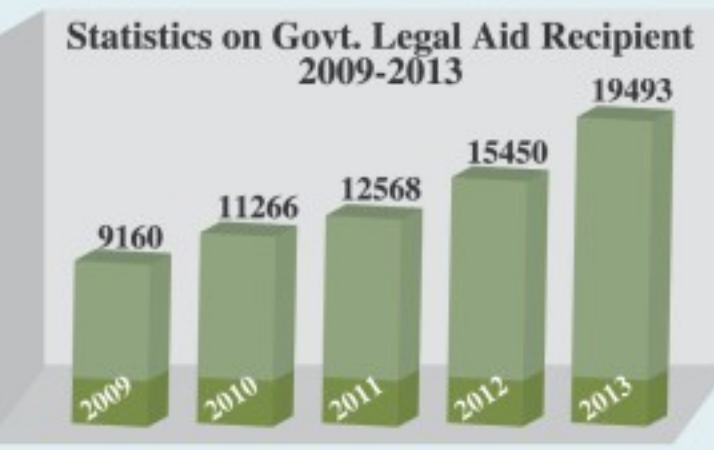
Government Legal Aid Programme is a pro-poor and social programme for people's welfare. The Government is implementing this programme with sufficient budget for the welfare of helpless, poor and underprivileged people. Many citizens of this country are being deprived of legal protection due to various socio-economic obstacles including insolvency. A huge number of people, due to their financial constraints, are not being able to reach the court, the last resort of justice, to establish their legal rights. With a vision to establish rule of law and justice in the society, the present pro-people and pro-poor Government, in its earlier tenure, enacted the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 to provide legal protection to financially incapable, destitute justice seekers who are otherwise incapable of getting justice due to various socio-economic reason. Though the earlier governments neglected this welfare service, the present democratic Government has succeeded to spread the Government Legal Aid Services to the grass-root level. Besides the financially incapable people, the victims of acid violence, widows or divorced women, person with disability, women and children who are victimized of human trafficking are being provided with Legal Aid in Government expense. With the support of the present government, we have succeeded to establish Legal Aid Office in every district. Necessary number of posts has been created for this office, including the post of Legal Aid Officer. Within a very short time, the District Legal Aid Offices have become a reliable shelter for helpless, underprivileged and destitute people. To ensure quality legal services through this office is a great challenge for the Government now. At the same time, the present Government is committed to utilize the District Legal Aid Office as "ADR Corner" or "Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre". We can utilize the interest that has been created among the common people including poor and destitute groups regarding this office and move forward a step ahead towards establishing Rule of Law and Justice. I believe that the support from Judges, Lawyers, Government and Non-government organizations and people at large will make the Government Legal Aid Services more effective, dynamic and strengthened.

I wish complete success for all programmes undertaken on the occasion of 'National Legal Aid Day 2014'.

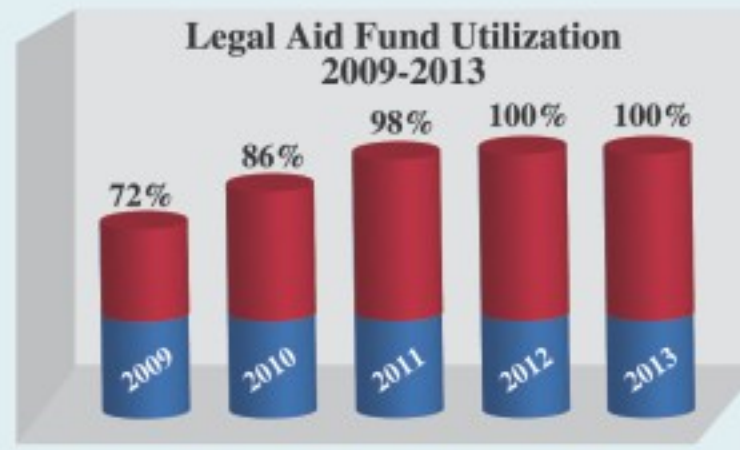


Abu Saleh Sheikh Md. Zahirul Haque

Information and Statistics about Legal Aid Services




Year	Recipient
2009	9160
2010	11266
2011	12568
2012	15450
2013	19493




Year	Utilization (%)
2009	72%
2010	86%
2011	98%
2012	100%
2013	100%

Challenges and Future Plans of the Government Legal Aid Services

1. To make District Legal Aid Offices as 'ADR Corner' or Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre to dispose of cases referred by Court or Tribunal with the intermediation of District Legal Aid Officer.
2. To ensure legal aid services for poor people beginning from Village Courts up to the Supreme Court at Government expenditure.
3. To pay the Advalem court fees and other ancillary costs for the poor and underprivileged litigants under the Government legal aid services.
4. To ensure waiting rooms, rest rooms and pure drinking water for all children and women justice seekers arriving at the legal aid office from faraway places.
5. Expanding Government legal aid services at the Labour courts and tribunal to dispose of disputes relating to wage, security and right to work for underprivileged women and garment workers.
6. To provide a 'package service' which comprises of legal aid services for poor and underprivileged community through joint initiatives of the GO-NGO governed by the public and private sectors.



Syed Aminul Islam
Director (District Judge)
National Legal Aid Services Organization



Syed Aminul Islam
Director (District Judge)
National Legal Aid Services Organization