

Press Release

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Hundreds of hijras and transgenders push for full access to health, education and employment opportunities

New Delhi (June 30, 2015): More than 350 hijras and transgenders across the country came together at the third National Hijra Habba to advocate for their social welfare and full access their rights. Policy makers, government representatives, social welfare officials, UN representatives, members of Parliament, National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) delegates, media, healthcare providers, and civil society also took part in the event in support of transgender and hijra communities in India.

Organised by India HIV/AIDS Alliance's Pehchan programme, the event highlighted how little has changed since the Supreme Court judgement in 2014 recognized them at the "Third Gender." The recent Rajya Sabha bill providing reservation in education, employment, financial aid and social inclusion for transgender s needs further action to become law.

To help push forward progress on these matters, the 2015 Hijra Habba served as a forum for dialogue for different stakeholders from government and communities to work towards an action plan for transgender and hijra welfare nationwide.

Held at the Eros Hotel in Nehru Place, the day's events included experience sharing, community performances, and discussions to expand transgender and hijra access to health, education and employment opportunities. **Monica Dogra** (singer and actress), **Sandeep Soparrkar**, (choreographer) and **Onir** (film director) showed their support, and the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment **Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot**, affirmed the Government's commitment to protect the rights of the transgender community.

Speaking about the Supreme Court' ruling on transgender rights, activist **Laya Medhini** pointed out, "With this judgement, the 'Third Gender' category has been created, thus giving a right of identity to all transgenders. They have been clearly recognized as vulnerable and must be able to access their rights."

James Robertson, Executive Director of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, said, "It is essential that the Government should develop responsive policies and ensure their implementation of this judgement at community level. Only when transgenders and hijras are able to access the full benefits of citizenship can they be truly empowered."

Leaders of the transgender movement, such as **Laxmi Narayan Tripathi**, **Akkai Padmashali** and **Gauri Sawant** also spoke about the importance of national forums, such as Hijra Habba, in pushing the Indian Government to work towards transgender and hijra welfare.

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About Pehchan:

Named for the Hindi word meaning 'identity,' 'recognition' or 'acknowledgement,' the Pehchan programme strengthens and builds the capacity of 200 community-based organisations to provide effective, inclusive and sustainable HIV prevention programming in 18 states in India for more than 450,000 men who have sex with men (MSM), transgenders and hijras. Pehchan is funded by the Global Fund and remains their largest single-

country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable and underserved sexual minorities. Along with Alliance India, the Pehchan consortium includes the Humsafar Trust, Pehchan North Region Office, SAATHII, Sangama, Alliance India Andhra Pradesh, and SIAAP.

About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:

Founded in 1999, India HIV/AIDS Alliance is a non-governmental organisation operating in partnership with civil society, government and communities to support sustained responses to HIV in India that protect rights and improve health. Complementing the Indian national programme, we build capacity, provide technical support and advocate to strengthen the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to vulnerable populations affected by the epidemic.

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