**International Summit on legal professionals with disabilities: it can be done**

About ILS Law College:

The Indian Law Society was established in 1923 and the Law College, Poona in 1924 with a very well-focused agenda to impart socially relevant and professionally desired quality legal education on scientific basis as ‘Justice Education’. We also ensure that values underlying the Constitution of India are also promoted and nurtured in the pedagogy.

With a view to walk the talk on inclusive and justice education ILS has spear-headed quality research work for protection and recognition of Rights of vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society. As part of our agenda to promote diversity amongst the students we actively encourage and promote disabled students to pursue legal education from our college we have established equal opportunity cum enabling cell in 2013 to practice inclusion and to help and encourage constructive interaction between disabled and non-disabled students. One of the mottos of Equal Opportunity cum Enabling Cell is to combat stigma around disability and promote accessible and barrier free environment. We at ILS firmly believe that disability has to do much more with socio-economic and legal barriers than physical and mental impairments.

With a view to promote disability studies in general and disability legal studies in particular we aspire to kick-start constructive interaction amongst disabled lawyers, judges and academics by organizing the International Summit on legal professionals with disabilities.

**About the Summit**:

“There exists a wide gap between what lawyers with disabilities, when provided the appropriate resources and tools, are capable of achieving, and what they are actually able to achieve, owing to the numerous obstacles placed on their path.” - Laura Wolk, Law Clerk to U.S Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

“To the seniors who are good enough to accept lawyers with disabilities, I would only say this: For most of us, as a lawyer, the fact that you are the protector of rights is the foundational reason for you entering this profession. If a lawyer with a disability comes to a senior, his case must be considered objectively, irrespective of his disability. That positive approach must be shown by seniors.”S.K.Rungta, Senior Advocate, Delhi High Court.

“I would like to ask any judge who is currently serving in India: if you went blind while on the bench, and were able to efficiently discharge your responsibility before this, how would you feel if told that you can no longer continue as a judge, even if you are able to perform your functions with some amount of retraining and ability to use adaptive tech?” David Szumowski, San Diego County Superior Court judge.

Despite being a skilled legal professional, imagine being told by employers that they have no place for you because of your disability or not having access to the same work and career growth opportunities as your able-bodied counterparts. That, unfortunately, is the reality that confronts scores of legal professionals with disabilities inIndia and beyond. It is to have a constructive conversation on how these structural realities can be effectively confronted that we plan to have an International Summit on Legal Professionals with Disabilities, to coincide with the international day on persons with disabilities.

The 3-day Summit will serve as a platform to set in motion a thought process for how the state of affairs can be effectively reversed. Through a series of three panel discussions, we hope to foster a well-considered dialogue on how we can break down the structural and attitudinal barriers that prevent disabled legal professionals from leading lives of equal productivity and dignity as their able-bodied counterparts.

The 3 panel discussions will be on the following dates/themes:

* 1st December, 2020: Interaction with legal academics with disabilities.
* 2nd December, 2020: Dialogue with lawyers with disabilities [litigators and corporate lawyers].
* 3rd December, 2020: Deliberations with judges with disabilities.

As part of the summit, we will launch a book featuring the interviews of 21 legal professionals with disabilities from 6 countries. These interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2018 as part of the IDIA Disability Access Programme [IDAP]. We are partnering with the Oxford Human Rights Hub and the Harvard Law School Project on Disability for this summit.

We hope that the sustained dialogue fostered by this Summit will offer us an intelligent way forward to help unleash the full potential of legal professionals with disabilities, in India and beyond.