CURTAIN RAISER

INAUGURATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRISON ADVOCACY PROJECT

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Symbiosis Law School, Pune, a constituent of Symbiosis International (Deemed University), is set to inaugurate the office of its **Prison Advocacy Project** on 3 November 2026 at Dnyaneshwar Bhavan, M.G. Road, Nashik, followed by formal events at Symbiosis Campus, Nashik, Maharashtra. The initiative seeks to strengthen access to justice for undertrial prisoners through legal aid, socio-legal interventions, institutional coordination, research, advocacy, and rehabilitation. Rooted in a rights-oriented approach, the project seeks to address the structural and procedural challenges that frequently impede access to justice for individuals awaiting trial and those from socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds.

Prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners often stems from inadequate legal representation, delays in bail and judicial proceedings, documentation gaps, and limited awareness of legal rights. Addressing these challenges through an integrated approach, the **Prison Advocacy Project** combines direct legal assistance, structured prison visits, and engagement with undertrial prisoners to identify legal and procedural barriers. It also seeks to strengthen coordination among prison authorities, courts, legal services authorities, legal aid advocates, police, prisoners' families, and other relevant governmental and civil-society stakeholders, along with promoting capacity building to improve access to justice. An important component of the initiative is its **Continuing Legal Educatio**n (**CLE**) Programme on Prison Justice and Legal Aid, which aims to develop professional capacity among legal practitioners. Through structured training, the programme will equip lawyers with practical knowledge of prison justice, bail and fair trial rights, prison and court procedures, case documentation, and institutional coordination. The project envisages training a cadre of 150 lawyers across Maharashtra, while its field-based interventions aim to enhance access to legal representation for 1,600 undertrial prisoners in Nashik prison over its three-year duration.

The inauguration ceremony will bring together distinguished representatives from the judiciary, legal and criminal justice institutions, academia, and civil society. The confirmed invitees include **Hon'ble Justice Sumant Kolhe**, Visiting Judge Scholar Residence; **Dr. C. R. Patil** and **Dr. Abhay Sukhatme**, Members of the Managing Committee, Symbiosis International (Deemed University); **Dr. Vandana Sonwaney**, Director, Symbiosis Institute of Operations Management (SIOM), Nashik; and **Ms. Johanna Barnabas Lokhande**, Representative, Azim Premji Foundation. **Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar**, Principal Director and Chancellor, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), will address the gathering virtually. The welcome address will be delivered by **Prof. (Dr.) Shashikala Gurpur, Fulbright Scholar, Jean Monnet Chair Professor (EUC-LAMP, co-funded by the European Union), Director, Symbiosis Law School, Pune, and Dean, Faculty of Law, Symbiosis International (Deemed University).**

The inauguration of the Prison Advocacy Project Office marks an important institutional step towards translating the commitment to access to justice into sustained field-level action, with a long-term vision of advancing a more inclusive and responsive justice system for future generations. By bringing together legal professionals, social work practitioners, academic institutions, and criminal justice stakeholders, the initiative seeks to foster a coordinated approach to prison advocacy, strengthen legal aid practices, build professional capacity, and advance a more inclusive and accessible justice system.