

Press Release

The 12th State Level Convention of Odisha Election held on 4th September 2016 at IDCOL House Auditorium, Bhubaneswar in collaboration with National Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms. This year's Focal Theme for discussion was "Transparency in Finances of Political Parties & panchayat election 2017 issues & concerns". In the inaugural session, Sj. Ranjan Kumar Mohanty, Coordinator, Odisha Election Watch, welcomed the guests and said that Odisha Election Watch has evolved as a strong network that aims at further promoting free and fair election. Sj. Ananta Charan Nayak, IAS, Addl. CEO-cum-Addl. Secretary, Home (elections) dept. highlighted on the active participation of all stakeholders to ensure free and fair election. Sj. Rabindra Nath Sahu, OAS, Secretary State Election Commission said that voters must exercise their right to vote and participate in the democratic process. Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Founder Trustee of Association of Democratic reforms says "He who plays the piper decides the tune. If the donors to parties are unknown, details of those controlling the functioning of such parties is also unknown, which is very worrying. If the parties claim to be doing public service by contesting elections, it is very worrying that 80% of their funds is unknown. It is not a very healthy state of affair when the parties' finances are not in public domain." Sj. Sahadev Sahoo, IAS (Retd), Ex-Chief Secretary and core team member (OEW) emphasized on more turn over in ethical voting and increased youth participation in the voting process that can bring about a great difference. Sj. Khyamakkar Swain gave the vote of thanks in the inaugural session.

In the first technical session, Transparency in finances of political parties was chaired by Sj. Dillip Bisoi, Senior Journalist. In the panel, Prof. Surya Narayan Mishra, core team member (OEW) gave emphasis on youth participation to ensure transparent governance and reduce the number of political parties. Sj. Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, Ex-MP, Editor-Sambad, and President, Aama Odisha, said that mass psychology has to be changed and election campaign days have to be reduced. Sj. Panchanan Kanungo, Former Finance Minister said that panchayat election should be free from involvement of any political parties and elections should be purely state-funded to check corruption. Sj. Sameer Mohanty, Vice-President, BJP, said that political parties should have inner party democracy. Capt. Dibya Shankar Mishra, MLA and Spokesperson, BJD highlighted on the importance of information dissemination at grass root level and the youths should take the forefront in the political process. Prof. Kailash Chandra Acharya, Chief Spokesperson, INC. Odisha said that all the elections should be held in the same period to dual expenditure. Sj. Santosh Das, State Secretariat Member, CPI (M) said that all political parties should be transparent in terms of public fund utilization and declare the same in the public domain. Sj. Baishnav Charan Parida, Ex-MP, BJD, said that political parties are accountable to public, hence, they must adopt to the ethical election process. Sj. Souribandhu Kar, State Secretariat member, CPI said that state funding is highly necessary to check corruption. In addition, he highlighted the importance of auditing these election funds for further transparency.

In the second panel, themed Panchayat elections and role of civil society organizations, under the chairmanship of Sj. Baikuntha Panigrahi, Ex-DDG, Doordarshan, Mrs. Chandana Das, Head-CWS, Sj. Sudarshan Das, Agami Odisha, Sj. Biswajit Padhi, Srusti-Nuapada gave valuable suggestions to take the campaign ahead. The afternoon session was themed on Free and fair Panchayat elections 2017-Issues and concerns, held under the chairmanship of Sj. Hrudaya Ballav Das, Former Judge. Sj. Sanjeev Hota, IAS (Retd), Former State election commissioner, Odisha, said that people have interest in Panchayat election, because they have easy access to the elected members. He also said that emphasis should be led on awareness of voters as well as political parties on the election process and procedures. Among others, Sj. Ganeswar Behera, Former minister, INC-Odisha, Sj. Sashi Bhusan Behera, MLA, Spokesperson, BJD, Sj. Sajjan Sharma, Chief spokesperson, BJP, Sj. Tejaswar Parida, BJD, Mrs. Tapasi Praharaaj, State Committee member, CPI (M), Sj. Ramakrushna Panda, State Committee member, CPI all emphasized free and fair elections in the panchayats can only be possible with voters awareness and participation in huge numbers.