

PRESS RELEASE

July 15, 2016

Shri Randeep Singh Surjewala, Incharge Communications, AICC has issued the following statement to the press today:-

The Congress Party welcomes the order of the National Commission of Scheduled Castes (NCSC), wherein it has observed that the amendments to the panchayat acts of Rajasthan and Haryana mandating education qualifications to contest elections have "impacted adversely on the SCs" by depriving them of the "right to contest elections" and the "right to vote for a candidate of their choice". As per the 2011 Census, the amendments exclude 75% of the rural population above the age of 20 years from contesting panchayat elections in Rajasthan and Haryana. 93% and 83% of SC women above the age of 20 years have been disqualified in Rajasthan and Haryana respectively.

The Commission notes that unless "universal literacy is achieved, there will always be large scale deprivation of opportunity to contest" [elections] and has recommended to the state governments to "reconsider the criteria of minimum education qualifications for the SC reserved seats". The NCSC has also expressed displeasure at not being consulted by the state governments prior to the amendments despite the Constitutional provision for mandatory consultation with the Commission (Art 338, Clause 9) on all major policy matters affecting Scheduled Castes.

The Congress Party has opposed these anti-dalit, anti-women and anti-poor amendments from the start because they nullify the 73rd amendment which sought to include SCs in self-governance through mandatory reservation, deny marginalised social groups their right to political participation in democracy and state institutions through the democratic process of elections. The Congress Party opposed the amendments not just in the respective states but also moved an amendment to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha during the budget session in March 2016 wherein it was passed with cross-party support in an act of censure to the Government - one of the only 5 times in the history of Parliament - despite the personal intervention of the Prime Minister.

The Congress Party urges the BJP-led Governments of Rajasthan and Haryana to repeal these amendments forthwith.