



Representation regarding Preventive Action for Heatwave and other Extreme Events and Protection of Vulnerable Communities during the Lok Sabha General Election 2024

Namaste!

Respected Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners

Election Commission of India

With respect to the above-mentioned subject, I am making this representation to draw your kind attention to the pressing issue of climate change-induced extreme weather events, particularly heatwaves and the need to protect vulnerable communities, especially persons with disabilities and old adults, during the upcoming Lok Sabha Election 2024.

The [research highlights](#) the significant challenges posed by extreme heatwaves during the election season. It underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate the impact of heatwaves on voters and election personnel, particularly in light of the increasing frequency and intensity of such events due to climate change that results in heightened vulnerability because of the greater exposure, higher sensitivity and lower ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change-induced heatwave and other extreme weather events like unseasonable rainfall and forest fires.

Persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable populations during extreme weather events, including heat waves. They often face additional barriers to accessing essential services and exercising their rights, including the right to vote. The intersectionality of disability and climate change underscores the importance of taking preventive and proactive measures to



safeguard the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities during the electoral process to ensure democracy that leaves no one behind.

Persons with disabilities, despite contributing the least and being [most vulnerable](#) to climate change, are at the forefront of climate change impacts, [including heatwaves](#), and are subject to eco-ableist climate action that often overlooks their disability-specific needs including universal accessibility, early warning, etc. Given that the best way to protect people from climate change is by [tackling “inequities such as those based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age, location and income”](#) and understanding climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” having a domino effect and undermining all aspects of life.

Therefore, I urge the Election Commission of India to take the necessary preventive, mitigating, adaptive, and resilient measures to protect persons with disabilities among other vulnerable communities during the Lok Sabha Election 2024. Specifically, we recommend the following actions:

- 1. Implementation of Heat Action Plans (HAPs):** Effective implementation of Heat Action Plans (HAPs) at the national, state, and local (district and city) levels during the whole election process with special attention to the needs of vulnerable communities in accordance with the existing laws and policies, including, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; The Disaster Management Act, 2005; National Disaster Management Plan, 2019; National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019; etc. in the pre-, during-, and post-heatwave and election interventions.

Additionally, immediate cognizance of the Advisory for State Health Department on Heat Wave Season, 2024 by the National Centre for Disease Control and strict time-bound



actions, concerning - 1. Dissemination of the relevant guidelines to all districts including (i) National Action Plan on Heat-Related Illnesses, MoHFW; (ii) Strengthening Health Systems Preparedness for Heat-Related Illnesses (HRI) in India; and (iii) National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) guidelines for the preparation of action plan for prevention and management of heat wave; 2. Coordination with State and District Task Force on Climate Change and Human Health; 3. Issue health advisories and plan essential information, education and communication (IEC) awareness activities, especially in regional languages and accessible format.

2. **Formulation of Standard Operating Procedures:** Formulate and implement Heatwave related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for various aspects including Polling Booths, Transportation, Deployment of Election officials and Security personnel, Election campaigns (including rallies, road shows, etc.), Nomination Processes, Counting Processes, etc., while ensuring special needs of the vulnerable communities, including, persons with disabilities, old adults, pregnant women, etc.
3. **Collaboration with NDMA and other concerned Public Authority:** Ultimately, the Election Commission of India must collaborate and coordinate with other public authorities and civil society organizations including the National Disaster Alert Portal: SACHET, India Meteorological Department, National Disaster Management Authority, National Disaster Response Force, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health, National Institute of Disaster Management, and other relevant authorities and bodies.
4. **Universal Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation:** Ensure that all polling stations are fully accessible to persons with disabilities and old adults, including those with the need for universal accessibility and reasonable accommodation. This includes



providing ramps, tactile paths, braille materials, and sign language interpreters as necessary among other facilities and services within the mandate of Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) in accordance with the Action Plan for Accessible Election for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) Electors.

5. **Heatwave Preparedness:** Develop comprehensive heatwave preparedness plans for polling stations located in areas prone to extreme heat and forest fires. This should include provisions for shade, drinking water, and adequate ventilation to mitigate and adapt the impact of high temperatures on voters and election personnel. Similar provisions for voters with disabilities and others involved in the election process, including the movement of public servants, political workers, security personnel, media crew, voters, etc. Moreover, there's a need to ensure health facility resiliency (like proper electricity distribution) and facility preparedness for the prevention and management of severe health-related illness (including procurement and supply of adequate quantities of essential medical kits, equipment, drugs, etc.).
6. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch targeted public awareness campaigns to educate voters with disabilities about the risks of extreme heat and the measures in place to support their participation in the electoral process. This should include information on accessible voting options and assistance available at polling stations. Further, the election commission must ensure that all such awareness resources are digitally accessible while being circulated across social media platforms and other mass communication mediums. Mission-mode awareness campaign shall be carried out in all twenty-two scheduled languages and in addition to sign language and braille format.
7. **Information Dissemination Strategies:** Dissemination of early warning and forecast using public broadcasting services, social media, radio and television, newspapers and



pamphlets, SMS, etc. Apart from mass communication mediums, the Sachet National Disaster Alert Portal [<https://sachet.ndma.gov.in>] shall be used for disseminating real-time early warnings/alerts related to disasters by Alert Generating agencies over the Common Alerting Protocol-based Integrated Alert System on a Pan India basis through multiple means of technology using geo-intelligence. In addition to Sachet App and the National Disaster Alert Portal, the India Meteorological Department website (mausam.imd.gov.in) shall be publicized to access the latest local weather alerts.

8. **Training, Sensitization and Capacity Building:** Provide specialized training to election personnel on effectively assisting voters with disabilities and addressing their disability-specific accessibility and reasonable accommodation needs during the election process. This training should cover topics such as disability etiquette, communication strategies, and handling assistive devices. Additionally, sensitization and capacity building of other relevant stakeholders in the election process about the universal accessibility and reasonable accommodation requirements including Built Environment Accessibility, Transportation System Accessibility, and Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility.
9. **Coordination with Disability and Other Vulnerable Communities and their Organizations:** Collaborate with disability rights organizations and advocacy groups to ensure that the concerns and recommendations of persons with disabilities are adequately addressed in election planning and implementation throughout the election process. Moreover, it must also include election icons from the persons with the disability community to raise awareness within the disability community.

It is imperative that the Election Commission of India takes proactive and preventive measures to protect the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities among other vulnerable



communities during the Lok Sabha Election 2024. By implementing the recommended measures among other things, the Commission can uphold the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and equality in our democratic process.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to your prompt action and cooperation in ensuring a safe and accessible electoral process for all citizens, including persons with disabilities.

Thank you

Adv. Abhishek Kumar



Important Resources:

1. Heat Wave, National Disaster Management Authority
<https://ndma.gov.in/index.php/Natural-Hazards/Heat-Wave>
2. NDMA - Heatwave: Do's & Dont's
<https://ndma.gov.in/Natural-Hazards/Heat-Wave/Dos-Donts>
3. NDMA - Heatwave: Resources
<https://ndma.gov.in/Natural-Hazards/Heat-Wave/Resources>
4. Advisory for State Health Department on Heat Wave Season 2024
https://ncdc.mohfw.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Advisory-for-State-Health-Department-on-heat-wave-season-2024_NPCCHH.pdf
5. Strengthening health systems preparedness for heat-related illnesses (HRI) in India
https://ncdc.mohfw.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/4_Strengthening-Health-Systems-Preparedness-for-Heat-Related-Illnesses-HRI-in-India_180423.pdf
6. Guidelines on Emergency Cooling for Severe Heat-Related Illnesses
https://ncdc.mohfw.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Emergency-Cooling-for-Severe-Heat-Related-Illnesses_March2024_NPCCHH.pdf
7. Public Health Advisory (Do's and Don'ts): Extreme Heat/Heat Wave 2024 (updated)
https://ncdc.mohfw.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NPCCHH_Public-health-advisory_Extreme-heat_Heatwave_2024.pdf
8. Impact of Heatwave on Persons with Disabilities
<https://sangyan.medium.com/heatwaves-and-disability-89d708739b6>