

Vulnerability of Helpline services to the Vulnerable.

1) Note addressing the recent articles pertaining to Dignity Foundation.

2) Support registered by civil society thinkers and activists

1) The Note -- by Dr. Sheilu Sreenivasan

It has come to our attention that certain articles have been reported in the press, related to the social services that Dignity Foundation provides. We believe these articles may not have provided a complete and accurate picture of Dignity's role and the circumstances around the case. As such, we wish to provide a factual representation so that the truth can be known:

The facts on the Hoshir Wadia case are as follows:

- Hoshir Wadia is an 89 year old senior citizen, living alone with domestic helps at his residence in Mathew Road.
- He approached Dignity Foundation for help and assistance on the Helpline followed by several written request letters.
- True to the mission of Dignity Foundation necessary help was rendered to him. He was very happy indeed that our staff and volunteers, with whom he struck a good rapport, were a source of relief from boredom and loneliness.
- During this period, Mr Wadia was under pressure from vested interests and when all options appeared closed to him, he wanted to invest powers in Dignity Foundation to help him lead a threshold comfortable life.
- His pleas to the Police for help and Dignity Foundation's own efforts to seek police help did not bear any result.
- Having nowhere to turn to for help, Mr Wadia made a Power of Attorney through his lawyer without consulting Dignity Foundation. It was NEITHER ACCEPTED NOR SIGNED BY US. **Dignity Foundation has never accepted or utilized any POA in its name.**
- Dignity Foundation did not have any role in the making or revoking of any of the POAs.
- Dignity has always ensured that all actions taken have been **on the basis of letters given by Mr Wadia through his lawyer.**
- Any other act of assistance and help were also provided on written requests.
- Due to family infighting, Dignity has been named in certain legal cases between rival parties fighting for the property of Mr Wadia. There are several related court cases between the parties and Dignity has no part in any one of these rival fights.
- The sum of about 1.24 lakhs was not withdrawn using POA and that the bank verified signatures and the entire amount was disbursed exactly as per written statements given by Wadia.
- The Police arrested in Dec 09 the manager working in Dignity Helpline, the lawyer of Mr Wadia and the Notary who attested the signatures of Mr Wadia, alleging all the signatures of the client have been forged. They were all kept in the lock up and then in the jail for one month. Harassment and ill treatment at the hands of the Police were suffered by all the three.
- Anticipatory bail was therefore taken by the President and two other staff members of Dignity Foundation
- The Judgment of the anticipatory bail observed that the role played by Dignity Foundation has not been found detrimental to the interests of the old man.
- Hearings have not yet begun. The course of law will take its own time.

The facts on the ACP William D'Souza case are as follows:

- This case occurred 10 years ago, and all the main stakeholders are now deceased
- The article published appeared to convey the impression that a staff member from Dignity Foundation was involved. Actually, Mr Mehta was a freelancing legal counselor(*and as a non-profit organization we have several volunteers who help with advice and counselling Seniors in*

matters of legal, finance, health, nutrition etc) whose help Dignity took every now and then. Mr Mehta was never authorized to do any of the things he has done.

- In fact, Mr Mehta appears to have colluded with various family members who were conspiring to access D'Souza assets.
- The moment Dignity came to know about Mehta's activities, **Dignity reported the case to the police.** From then on, Dignity has had no role to play and this has been a police case.
- *At no point in time has the police or any court investigated or accused Dignity in this case, further proving that we are not involved.*

Dignity Foundation's basic premise

- Dignity provides social services to the needy.
- In this cruel world we live in, there are numerous instances where senior citizens are victims of horrendous crimes since they are aged, sometimes in poor health, and occasionally have precious assets that others covet.
- A core part of Dignity's social work is to protect senior citizens from being harrassed, tormented or deceived. We do so in the most professional manner through the use of our Helpline, counselling services, access to legal services, and police intervention. We have even initiated a Project in 2008 in collaboration with the Police to ensure safety of elders living alone.
- Over the 15 years of Dignity's history, we have assisted [more than 1,00,000] senior citizens who have been pleased and gratified with the social services that we have provided. By protecting senior citizens against their detractors, it is only natural that their enemies become our enemies. As evident in the Hoshir Wadia and William D'Souza cases, it is natural that individuals conspiring against the victims would accuse Dignity Foundation of interference.

Dignity Foundation has not violated any law nor appropriated the property of any elderly. We have a long lasting relationship with Government bodies and have their recognition for the good work we have done. We also enjoy the support of private corporations and individuals in India and abroad. All such relationships have been arrived at only after due diligences have been conducted on Dignity Foundation.

We continue to be dedicated to our mission of caring for the elderly. These situations and crises strengthen our resolve *and proves that the aged in our country need many more organizations like us to live a dignified life.*

- In the past there have been several NGOs who have been attacked for doing good work.
- Today it is Dignity Foundation.
- Tomorrow it can be any other NGO working for the vulnerable – children, women and senior citizens.
- Many elder helpline are themselves operated by senior citizens
- The Civil Society has to stand up for providing credible NGOs and protect them from malicious campaign and corruption.
- Every NGO serving children, women and senior citizens are likely to face such situations where the helping organisation itself is attacked for the very act of helping.

Dr. Sheilu Sreenivasan
 Founder President, Dignity Foundation
 Dated June 3, 2010

2) The Support

Civil society activists and thinkers are united in their strong support to Dignity Foundation at this juncture of baseless attack by the Police and the media. The cause of senior citizens is very dear to the country and the work of Dignity Foundation is of pioneering nature. We rise in support of Dignity Foundation and its Chief Dr. Sheilu Sreenivasan, her Team of dedicated staff and senior citizen volunteers.

Sucheta Dalal

Bharati Marfatia

Noshir Dadrawala

B N Makhija

29 Chief Dignitarians