

Surinder Singh Oberoi, Communication and Political Adviser for the ICRC in New Delhi, speaks to Piyush Tewari, Founder of SaveLIFE Foundation, about the Good Samaritan Law and how this new piece of legislation offers the much-needed protection and encouragement to every individual who comes forward to help when it counts the most.

SSO: Hundreds of people – pedestrians, drivers – get killed in road accidents. We have seen many a times that passers-by and bystanders who should be the first-responders hardly care for them and just pass by the area. We have come here to discuss the issue, which our guest today Mr Piyush Tewari has taken up. And he is fighting that bystanders should be allowed to be good Samaritans so that they are able to help the people out there.

Mr Piyush, thank you very much for joining us for this particular show for our blog. Please let me know what exactly the Good Samaritan Law speaks about.

PT: So it addresses three specific issues. One is the intimidation by police. So the police can't force you to reveal your details if you don't wish to.

The police can't detain you as a Good Samaritan if you bring somebody to the hospital. You can leave anybody you want.

The hospital can't detain you till the time the police arrives. They can't force you to reveal the details and they can't demand money from you.

And finally, if you declare that you are also an eyewitness and you are called to the court then the court proceedings need to be wrapped up in a very swift manner as far as your testimony is concerned.

So it provides a conducive environment to come and help an injured person.

SSO: We have been told that you are the soul behind this law and you are the ones who have done a lot of hard work for it. Could you please explain in a nutshell what were the difficulties which you faced and how you got initiated, interested in this?

PT: Well, it's really been a team effort. At SaveLIFE, the whole team has worked on this. So I'd say that while I initiated the exercise because I lost somebody in my own family in a road accident. My cousin was lying on the road for about forty minutes and didn't get any help from passers-by at three-thirty in the afternoon – which was the trigger for me to start looking at this issue. But really a lot of people came together to support me in this initiative.

We were lucky to get support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Global Road Safety Partnership, which is hosted by them, came on board as a partner. Bloomberg Philanthropies came on board as a partner.

SSO: What type of trainings would you like the people to do?

PT: We feel that first-aid training should be compulsory for everyone. In many parts of the world it's an essential life skill which is taught to people from five years of age onwards. In India, however, it is only an optional subject in our schooling and in many places it is not even available.

And what first-aid does is, it really enhances the chances of survival of an injured person or an ill person in a scenario where emergency care may not be available immediately. So in a scenario like India, it is imperative that people go through that training.

We conduct a course for police officers and for citizen volunteers. It's a half-day training where we train three basic things – how to control bleeding, how to immobilise a c-spine and how to revive somebody's pulse. And we have seen that training having a massive impact on people. In Delhi, for example, while the number of road accidents have gone up, the number of deaths have dropped by thirty per cent in the last five years. And the reason behind that has been that while people are getting injured, while being rushed to the hospital they are getting first-aid from the police. Their bleeding is being controlled, their pulse is being revived. So, the police is no longer transporting dead bodies to the hospital. They are actually attempting to revive them. And that has caused about 800 lives every year to be saved as a result of that.

SSO: And you find that this law is helping and improving the situation?

PT: Well I would first like to thank you for getting the word out to the last mile. We believe that it is yet to be seen what the impact of the legislation is. People should know about this, people should know that they have rights that they can use and that they can come forward and help an injured person. And it is only once we have made sure that everybody knows about it that we'll start seeing change on the ground. That's really what our attempt right now is.

SSO: What is the next step of SaveLIFE Foundation after this?

PT: We are already working on the prevention of road accidents. So we are advocating for a comprehensive road safety law that addresses various issues that plague the road safety universe – starting from licencing, how people get to drive, training, road engineering, vehicle engineering, enforcement, trauma care. Various aspects that lead to India having the highest number of road accident deaths in the world need to be addressed in a cohesive manner.

SSO: And what is your dream, what should be the end result?

PT: You know a lot of people call our vision audacious. But we believe that India can reach a zero fatality vision if it does a concerted campaign. We have shown that in polio and we are beginning to show that in a number of areas like malaria, HIV. And I am pretty sure that with road crashes also we can bring it down to zero or close to zero if we act in a concerted manner and treat it as an epidemic which it really is.

SSO: Road accidents is the biggest killer that's what we have been told. And imagine if we have zero fatality. And for that you as a bystander will have to help not only this organisation but your own selves and your own community. This is what is important today.

Thank you Mr Piyush. It has been a pleasure to meet you and we are always there to support you.