



Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless

PRESS RELEASE

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Jury on 'Public Hearing on Violence against Homeless Women in Delhi' strongly condemns systemic violence against homeless women

Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless) – a collective of over twenty civil society organizations and homeless groups in Delhi – organised a 'Public Hearing on Violence against Homeless Women in Delhi' on 13 August 2013. At the public hearing, twelve homeless women testified before an esteemed jury, while over 200 homeless women and men participated as members of the audience.

The jury for the public hearing consisted of: former Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi – Justice A. P. Shah; former Chief Justice, High Court of Himachal Pradesh – Justice Leila Seth; former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing – Miloon Kothari; Assistant Editor, Times of India – Ambika Pandit; and, Executive Director, Partners for Law in Development – Madhu Mehra.

The jury was deeply disturbed by the testimonies of the homeless women, which revealed the daily violence and abuse suffered by them. These acts of violence are committed by a range of actors, including the Delhi Police, government agencies, and residents of Delhi. The jury unequivocally condemned the violence against homeless women and the multiple violations of their human rights, and issued a strong statement that also mentions factors responsible for rising homelessness, such as forced evictions and the absence of affordable housing in Delhi.

The jury made specific recommendations aimed at improving living conditions for Delhi's homeless women and putting an end to acts of violence against them.

Some of the recommendations made by the jury include the need for:

- Separate permanent, year-round, 24-hour shelters for homeless women, including for working women and families, with adequate day care facilities;
- The creation of a committee with representatives from the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Cantonment, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and housing rights organizations, to address issues of civic services, housing and land;
- The implementation of a comprehensive housing and shelter plan that caters to the varied needs of the homeless population;
- Special attention to be given to the provision of adequate healthcare facilities, including maternal healthcare, for homeless women and protection of their reproductive rights;

- Provision of vital documents like ration cards and voter cards for homeless women; and,
- The creation of a counselling cell for homeless women to assist them with provision of information, procurement of identification cards, processing of complaints, and accessing legal remedies and redress for acts of violence.

The jury also asserted that it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that there is an end to the mistreatment of homeless women and the numerous forms of violence perpetrated against them; that homeless shelters are better equipped and provide adequate living conditions; that free healthcare facilities are provided for homeless women; and, that homeless women in Delhi are guaranteed their rights under national, constitutional and international law.

Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (SAM:BKS) is extremely grateful to the esteemed members of the jury for their support and strong condemnation of all forms of violence against homeless women in Delhi. SAM:BKS also hopes that the new government in Delhi as well as independent institutions such as the Delhi Commission for Women, National Commission for Women, Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and the National Human Rights Commission take cognizance of the jury's recommendations and implement immediate measures to guarantee the human rights of homeless women and protect them against violence.

SAM:BKS has prepared a short report of the public hearing, which contains the testimonies of the homeless women and the statement of the jury. The report and the jury statement are attached to this press release.

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Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (SAM:BKS – *Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless*) is a Delhi-based collective of over 20 organizations and social movements, including homeless citizens. Founded in 2008, SAM:BKS works to promote and protect the human rights of the homeless, as guaranteed by the Constitution of India and international human rights instruments, and to ultimately secure adequate housing for all homeless people.

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