



PRESS RELEASE

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Homeless Residents of Delhi Celebrate World Homeless Day; Submit Memorandum to the Government with their Demands

Homeless residents from across Delhi along with members of *Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath* (SAM:BKS)—a collective of over 25 civil society organizations, social movements, and homeless people's groups working to promote the realisation of the human rights of Delhi's homeless—marked the occasion of **World Homeless Day** in New Delhi today.

The day marked the conclusion of a ten-day *Beghar Jagrukta Cycle Yatra* (homeless awareness bicycle rally) that commenced on 2 October 2017, on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti and World Habitat Day. Over the last ten days, SAM:BKS members travelled across Delhi, covering a distance of over 500 kilometres on bicycle. During this period, they interacted with thousands of homeless residents in 200 homeless clusters, shelters, and evicted settlements. The goals of the rally were to spread awareness on the human rights and entitlements of the homeless, as well as the message of solidarity and humanity for World Homeless Day. The rally was launched with the aim of remembering Mahatma Gandhi through his philosophy of reaching out to the most marginalized in society, and of raising the demand for affordable housing for the homeless (this year's theme for World Habitat Day).

The World Homeless Day celebration commenced with a congregation outside the office of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) where the homeless and members of SAM:BKS presented a memorandum of demands to the government. This was followed by a press conference at which homeless residents discussed their struggles and challenges, and also shared their aspirations for a better life with secure housing and livelihood protection.

Homelessness constitutes the worst violation of human rights, especially the right to life, the human right to adequate housing, the human right to health, the human right to security of the person and home, and the human right to live with dignity. Homeless persons, though contributing to the economy with their subsidized labour, are denied citizen entitlements such as voter identity cards, labour cards, ration cards, and health insurance, and continue to face harassment, humiliation, and violence at the hands of law enforcement agencies.

Delhi, the capital city of India, is home to over 150,000 homeless persons, including at least 10,000 homeless women and 50,000 homeless children. Despite noteworthy efforts of the government and civil society, the homeless still remain on the margins of society and suffer multiple violations of their human rights, including their fundamental right to live with dignity and security. Though Delhi currently has 183 shelters for the homeless, these accommodate only about 10-15 per cent of the city's homeless population. The majority are still left to fend for themselves and live in precarious locations, on railway platforms, on the streets, or under flyovers, having to deal with Delhi's extreme heat, cold, and heavy rains.

From 1 January 2016 to 30 September 2017, **5,578** unidentified dead bodies were recorded in Delhi. It is estimated that at least **4,184** (75 per cent) of these belonged to homeless people.

Some of the major findings during the bicycle rally organized by SAM:BKS include the following:

- The majority of the homeless still do not have identity cards because of the lack of proof of residence, which then denies them their right to access various entitlements.
- Evictions of the homeless, including from under flyovers, in the name of ‘city beautification’ was reported as a serious threat for many homeless residents.
- Forced evictions from settlements without any resettlement, has led to many families being rendered homeless by the state.
- The lack of security for homeless women and children is a serious issue of concern. Several incidents of violence against homeless women were reported.
- The absence of hygiene, cleanliness, and basic services continues to be a common complaint in many homeless shelters and clusters where the homeless live.
- Homeless children suffer extreme violations, including violence and abuse. They are also denied their fundamental right to education. There is an acute lack of *anganwadis*/ICDS centres for street children.
- Lack of access to medical aid and healthcare services, including access to hospitals, is a serious issue for the homeless.
- Police brutality was also reported in many areas.

In light of the above findings, SAM:BKS presented a memorandum to DUSIB on behalf of Delhi’s homeless residents. The memorandum included the following demands for DUSIB:

- 1) **Enable homeless shelters to function as facilitation centres to provide identity and entitlement documents for the homeless**, including ration cards, election/voter identity cards, and Aadhar cards.
- 2) **Equip homeless shelters to serve as resource centres for the homeless**, and provide linkages with educational, livelihood, and health services, including hospitals, schools, and *anganwadis*/ICDS centres.
- 3) **Establish a consultative committee**, as suggested in the DUSIB Act, to monitor conditions of all shelters.
- 4) **Conduct an immediate survey of the homeless population**, with the active participation of homeless communities and civil society groups working with the homeless, in order to be able to better plan policy response and interventions.
- 5) **Provide sufficient shelters, based on the actual homeless population and as per Supreme Court orders and the requirements of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission – Scheme of Shelters for Urban Homeless (NULM–SUH)**. The government should build more shelters in areas where there is need. Special shelters should be built for persons with mental illness, disabilities, chemical dependencies, and chronic illnesses. Separate shelters are also required for working men, single women, families, and survivors of violence, as per NULM–SUH norms.
- 6) **Conduct regular shelter audits**, as recommended in NULM–SUH, with the active participation of homeless residents, independent institutions, and civil society.
- 7) **Ensure the safety and security of women and children** by undertaking adequate measures, including the installation of CCTV cameras, building secure gates and boundary walls around shelters, ensuring the presence of women police officials at shelters, and providing secure toilets and bathrooms for women and children. Lockers should also be provided in all shelters.
- 8) **Ensure provisioning of food** as per the NULM–SUH guidelines. Shelters for the highly vulnerable should provide free cooked food for their residents, while other shelters should aim

to provide food once a day at highly subsidized rates, and also provide space for cooking and storing food and cooking implements.

- 9) **Carry out training to build capacity of managers and shelter management agencies**, so that they are equipped to deal with the challenges faced by the homeless community. Also ensure that working rights of caretakers and managers are not violated in any form. Pay at least minimum wages and provide a weekly day off to all shelter caretakers/managers.
- 10) **Move beyond shelters** – The government should address structural causes of homelessness and work to provide durable solutions towards ensuring adequate, permanent housing for the homeless. This includes building linkages to housing schemes, developing social rental housing, and providing rehabilitation, life-skill and livelihood training for the homeless. Shelters are only the first step towards rehabilitation of the homeless on a continuum of housing rights.

The government should also implement progressive orders of the Supreme Court of India and the High Court of Delhi related to protecting the rights of the homeless and improving their living conditions.

While appreciating state initiatives to address homelessness, on World Homeless Day, SAM:BKS calls upon the government—at both the central and state levels—to work in collaboration to uphold the human rights of the homeless, and to ensure that every homeless person is able to live in secure housing with safety and dignity. This would also help the government to meet its national and international legal commitments, including under the Universal Periodic Review, at which India committed to implementing three recommendations related to housing, with a specific commitment to ending homelessness by the year 2030.

For more information, please call: 95822-29754, 99875-80014, or 98182-05234.

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