

Press Release on Public Hearing at Bhatti Mines

- Large Public Hearing held at Sanjay Colony (Bhagirath Nagar), Bhatti Mines
- Eminent Persons Condemn the Supreme Court order to Demolish Bhagirath Nagar

Over 1000 people, including school children, participated in a public hearing held at Sanjay Colony (Bhagirath Nagar), Bhatti Mines. Organised by Abhyudaya and Stop Evictions Campaign – a coalition of over 40 civil society groups and social movement representatives – the public hearing brought to light the legal, historical, and social issues of more than 4500 families in Sanjay Colony (Bhagirath Nagar), Bhatti Mines who face the imminent threat of demolition and forced eviction.

At the public hearing, residents of Bhatti Mines presented testimonies, which included evidence of how they were given legal guarantee in 1976 to establish a village in this area. Spread out over 145 acres, this settlement was created for refugees from Pakistan by late Sanjay Gandhi in 1976 and has grown into a full-fledged village with State support until 1990. In April 1991, a notification of Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, declared the area as a Wildlife Sanctuary under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, thus calling for the final closure of Bhatti Mines. Since then, infrastructure support for the area was suspended. On 9th April, 2006, the Delhi government after submitting false evidence in the Supreme Court obtained an order to demolish Sanjay Colony (Bhagirath Nagar).

Ranjeet, Chandrapal, Sughad devi, Laxmi and Hemlata were among those who spoke about the history and development of Bhagirath Nagar. In 1980-81 residents received ration cards while in 1983 the village was included in the Bhatti Gram Panchayat. Residents challenged the baseless and dubious re-notification of the village as a slum in 1990, and declaration of the area as a Sanctuary in 1991. The village currently houses over 25,000 people and includes two schools, an ayurvedic hospital, government veterinary centre, a community hall, police post, an asphalted road, and a regular bus service. While Bhatti Mines is being targeted for “encroaching” on the Ridge, residents questioned why farmhouses and religious organisations continue to occupy large tracts of land in the area and face no demolition threat.

The original 1996 directives of the Court, envisaged a separately funded, permanent resettlement project in nearby Jaunapur. In contravention of this, a Supreme Court directive dated 7th February 2006 based on an arbitrary affidavit submitted by the chief secretary of Delhi, says that residents of Sanjay Colony are to be shifted to Savda Ghevra, which is still completely undeveloped with no basic civic amenities in place.

The jury consisting of Miloon Kothari – UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Bela Bhatia – sociologist, Prashant Bhushan – Supreme Court lawyer, Anita Soni – social activist, and Indu Prakash Singh – Stop Evictions Campaign, strongly condemned the Supreme Court’s demolition order and called for state protection and legal security of tenure for the residents of Bhatti Mines.

Prashant Bhushan condemned the unjust nature of the Supreme Court order and other anti-poor judgements of the courts. Bela Bhatia spoke of the erosion of democracy and its failure to guarantee equal rights to the urban and rural poor. Miloon Kothari stressed that people clearly have rights under the Constitution and international human rights instruments, and any move to evict them is clearly in violation of these provisions. Indu Prakash Singh expressed concern over the dismal conditions of resettlement sites such as Bawana and Savda Ghevra, while Anita Soni revealed the politics of land, including controversies concerning the Ridge.

The jury members also condemned the April 20, 2006 demolition of Indira Nagar and Balbir Nagar in Bhatti Mines. They expressed their support for the indefinite hunger strike launched by Bhagirath Nagar residents on 27 June 2006. While the lives and livelihoods of over 25,000 people are at risk, the Supreme Court and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi continue to endorse the annihilation of a rich historical and cultural heritage.

The public hearing ended with a pledge to reinforce the struggle to protect Bhagirath Nagar from demolition and to resist forced evictions across Delhi. Slogans such as “Jaan de denge, ghar nahin denge” resonated in the village

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