PRESS RELEASE

Campaign on 'Adequate Housing for the Homeless' Launched
World Homeless Day Commemorated with Delhi's Homeless Community

New Delhi, 10 October 2019

To mark the occasion of **World Homeless Day**, celebrated on 10 October every year around the world, **Housing and Land Rights Network** (HLRN) organized a special gathering with Delhi's homeless community. At the event, held at Pusa Road Roundabout, several homeless women, men, and children shared their concerns and discussed the various challenges of living without a home in the city.

Pusa Road Roundabout is an important site for Delhi's struggle against homelessness. In December 2009, in the peak of winter, it was at Pusa Roundabout that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi demolished a homeless shelter that led to the death of two homeless persons. An effective media campaign by *Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath* (co-founded by HLRN) led to a *suo moto* case (W.P. (C) 29/2010) being initiated by the Chief Justice of Delhi against the Government of Delhi. The case, which lasted four years in the High Court of Delhi, resulted in a series of positive orders that greatly helped improve the situation of homeless persons in Delhi, including in terms of the number of shelters and facilities offered. Despite the historic nature of the site, homeless persons in the vicinity of Pusa Road continue to experience adverse living conditions.

On 2 October 2019, which marked the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, and in the run-up to World Habitat Day (7 October) and World Homeless Day (10 October), HLRN launched a campaign titled, **Adequate Housing for the Homeless**. This campaign aims to consolidate the demands of the majority of homeless persons for the provision of permanent, secure, and dignified housing.

Independent experts and civil society organizations estimate that Delhi has between 150,000 and 200,000 homeless persons. Efforts of the Delhi government to address homelessness have been commendable, especially compared to other cities and states in India. While Delhi has the highest number of shelters—almost 200—for homeless persons, the majority of the city's homeless people are still living out on the streets in precarious locales, and witness multiple violations of their human rights on a daily basis, most significantly of their right to live with dignity. Homeless women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons face the worst impacts of being homeless.

The focus of the Indian government—both at the central and state levels—when dealing with homelessness mostly has been limited to the provision of shelters. While shelters are a necessary measure, they provide only a temporary, humanitarian solution, and constitute the first step on a 'continuum of housing rights' with the end goal being the provision of adequate housing. While shelters are required to ensure that homeless persons do not suffer on the streets and while they meet the needs of certain vulnerable groups, they are not a durable solution for the majority of the working homeless population. Through sustained interaction with homeless persons over the last two decades, HLRN has found that the clear demand that has emerged is for permanent, adequate housing; for a space of their own that people can call *home*. Thus, HLRN has launched this campaign to intensify efforts for the realization of the human right to adequate housing for the homeless.

Over the last week, through this campaign, HLRN conducted various events with homeless persons across Delhi, including those living in shelters and out on the streets. These included interactions at the sites of Kalkaji, Meena Bazaar, Modi Mill, Nizamuddin, Sarai Kale Khan, Shakur Basti, and Tilak Nagar, among others.

Ruksana, a homeless woman from Meena Bazaar, asserted, "*We want education and a life of dignity for our children. We are also voters and we also deserve a house*." A young homeless man stated that, "*The government should direct its attention to the plight of the homeless. Homeless persons should have access to livelihood opportunities*." Another person called for the government to notice homeless people – "*Hamaari taraf sarkaar ko nigaah deni chaahiye*."

The demands of homeless persons, as articulated at the World Homeless Day event and during other meetings of the HLRN campaign, include:
- Access to permanent, adequate housing, with basic facilities.
- Access to clean drinking water and secure toilets, especially for homeless women.
- Access to education, including crèches/*anganwaadis*, for all homeless children.
- Identity cards such as voter cards, Aadhaar cards, and ration cards for all homeless persons.
- Immediate measures by the government to improve the living conditions of the homeless and reduce their invisibilization.

In order to meet the needs of different homeless groups, HLRN believes that a continuum of housing options are required, including hostels for single working men and women; short-stay homes for survivors of domestic violence; recovery homes for those with serious health issues, including chemical dependency; collective/group housing for persons with disabilities, older persons, single mothers, and others who do not want to live by themselves; and, access to rental and ownership housing.

On World Homeless Day, in collaboration with Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC), Chennai, HLRN also extended its campaign of Adequate Housing for the Homeless to the state of Tamil Nadu.

The homeless population accounts for about one per cent of India's urban population, and according to HLRN, must be given priority in all state housing schemes as well as financial assistance to enable them to access adequate housing, so that they can live with dignity, peace, safety, and security.

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