



PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, 10 October 2023

Campaign on 'Adequate Housing for the Homeless' (Phase II) Launched Calls for Permanent Housing Solutions for the Homeless, Beyond Shelters

On the occasion of **World Homeless Day 2023**, marked on 10 October every year globally, **Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN)** launched the second phase of the **Campaign on Adequate Housing for the Homeless** (*Awas Adhikar Abhiyan*) to strengthen the demands of homeless persons for safe, secure, and dignified housing beyond shelters.

The Campaign was launched at a community event held at the shelter for homeless persons at Bangla Sahib, Delhi and attended by residents, homeless persons from across the city, civil society members, among others. The official logo of the Campaign, signifying the collective call, demand, and efforts for housing, was also unveiled at the event.

Following the launch, an open discussion with stakeholders was facilitated where several homeless women, men, and children highlighted the increasing challenges of living without a home in the city, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, and underscored the urgency of addressing homelessness.

Pushpa, an older woman living at the shelter, asserted, *"We want a home for ourselves; we cannot spend our lifetime in the shelter. Even if we are given a small house, we will be happy and content to live there. This is our only request from the government."* A young boy stated, *"We don't even have space to play football at the shelter"*, articulating the need felt by many homeless children for a safe space to play and grow. Dharmendra Kumar, Managing Director, Janpahal, added that, *"Portable cabins and shelters are a temporary solution, until the right to housing (of homeless persons) is fulfilled."* Homeless persons also expressed their demands on a long piece of cloth, that will be carried to different locations across the city during the course of the Campaign, for people to explicitly state their demands.

The first phase of this Campaign was conducted from October 2019–2020 and reached over 20,000 people living in homelessness across Delhi through public meetings, postcard and signature campaigns, and awareness sessions, among other events. The upcoming phase aims to build on the impact of its previous edition.

During the next few months, a series of events will be organized under the Campaign, to intensify the efforts of Delhi's homeless community to move one step closer towards adequate housing.

A detailed concept note for the Campaign is annexed below.

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आवास अधिकार अभियान

Campaign on Adequate Housing for the Homeless

Campaign on 'Adequate Housing for the Homeless' (Phase II)

The **Campaign on Adequate Housing for Homeless Persons (Phase II)** aims to intensify efforts for the realization of the human right to adequate housing for the homeless and highlight important issues related to homelessness in Delhi. The Campaign advocates for a 'Housing First'¹ approach under which all homeless persons are given first/immediate priority in all existing government housing schemes at the state and central level instead of focusing merely on shelters and temporary solutions.

Housing First is an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness.

Background

Independent experts and civil society organizations estimate that Delhi has between 200,000 and 250,000 homeless persons. 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 addressing 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. Although 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.

The Covid-19 pandemic has left deep and long-lasting impacts on people living in homelessness, exacerbating their existing challenges, and pushing them further into poverty. During this period, a large section of people returned to homelessness due to their lack of income and inability to pay rent. In the aftermath of the pandemic, homeless people continue to struggle for livelihood and are unable to afford basic necessities, including housing. Homeless persons have been forced to move around the city several times over the last few years due to state action, which has resulted in their dispersion and loss of a collective identity. Moreover, instead of providing durable housing solutions for those without a home, in March 2023, eight homeless shelters at Yamuna Pushta and one at Sarai Kale

¹ See: <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf>

Khan, were demolished, depriving people of even the last resort for a dwelling. Thus, the issue of homelessness has taken a backseat within policy and welfare considerations rendering a large section of people invisible. In this context, after several consultations with homeless persons in Delhi, a need was felt to initiate the second phase of the Campaign on Adequate Housing for the Homeless to bring the issue of homelessness within the public discourse and expedite the demand of homeless persons for permanent, adequate housing.

Previous Phase and Achievements

The first phase of the Campaign was launched on 2 October 2019 and reached out to over 20,000 persons living in homelessness. During this phase, a clear demand emerged for permanent, adequate housing for homeless persons; for a space that people can call home.

Some Highlights of the First Phase include:

- Meetings and consultations were organized at over 30 sites in Delhi with over 20,000 people living in homelessness.
- Through a postcard campaign, around 800 homeless people, including children, wrote their demands for housing, education, and basic amenities to elected officials including the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Prime Minister of India.
- A petition was prepared with the demands of the homeless persons in Delhi, which was signed by over 1,000 people and was submitted to the Chief Minister of Delhi.
- During the nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the pandemic, sustained advocacy was conducted through the Campaign to ensure that free food was distributed in shelters and additional shelters were set up for those living on the streets.
- At the beginning of the Campaign, Delhi's homeless population was largely unaware about their right to adequate housing and had resigned to a life without a *home*. The Campaign was able to bring together people living in homelessness, created awareness about the human right to housing, and assisted them to make demands for adequate housing on a priority basis along with basic amenities from the government.

Objectives of Phase II

The second phase of the Campaign commencing on 10 October 2023, intends to build upon the impact of the previous phases and strengthen the demand for safe, secure, and dignified housing for the homeless. In particular, this phase of the Campaign will focus on:

- **Facilitating the Right to Housing:** Advocate for the fundamental right to housing for all individuals along a continuum of housing, from shelters to permanent residences.
- **Bridging the Gap:** Foster collaboration and understanding between the homeless community, the police, and government officials to improve communication, empathy, and coordination in addressing the housing crisis.
- **Increasing Legal Awareness and Advocacy:** Conduct legal awareness programs to educate homeless individuals about their rights and legal recourse, ensuring their rights are upheld and protected.
- **Facilitating Community Engagement:** Engage with the homeless community and gather their perspectives and needs, enabling a holistic approach to policy advocacy and program implementation.

Conclusion

We hope that the second phase of the Campaign, will bring the issue of homelessness back to the focus, enable Delhi's homeless community to collectively demand their longstanding demand for a home, and lead to sustainable housing options catered for the homeless from the government. Above all, we hope that the Campaign will facilitate steps to restore the personhood and dignity of homeless persons in Delhi.

*If you wish to participate in the Campaign or support it in any way, please write to us at:
endhomelessness.india@gmail.com or call 98228-64145 / 96540-68066*

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