



**HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**New Delhi, 9 December 2016**

**Forced Eviction in Delhi Renders over 1500 Homeless in the Winter Cold**

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**Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN)**, India, strongly condemns the forced eviction and demolition of 250–300 homes in Kishangarh, Delhi during the winter.

A 10-year old settlement that houses between 250 and 300 families, Ward Number 2 in Kishangarh is located between Mehrauli and Vasant Kunj, near Jawaharlal Nehru University in southwest Delhi. Most of the residents work as rag-pickers or domestic workers in the area.

On Monday, 5 December and Tuesday, 6 December 2016, Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), accompanied by a large police force, demolished all homes in the settlement of Kishangarh without any prior notice or consultation. At the time of demolition, the majority of residents were away at work. One bulldozer on 5 December and two on 6 December were used to raze all homes and clear the land. The two central government agencies have not provided any information on the reason for the demolition, which has rendered over 1500 people homeless.

*The forced eviction has raised many serious concerns, some of which are highlighted below:*

- 1) Since no prior notice was given to the residents, they were not able to retrieve their belongings from their homes. All families, thus, lost not just their homes but also most of their personal possessions and vital documents during the demolition process. It is estimated that each family suffered an average loss of at least Rs 75,000. There seem to be no plans of the government to provide any compensation to the affected persons for this significant loss.
- 2) After the eviction, all school-going children in the settlement have been forced to drop-out of school, as their families are busy trying to salvage their possessions and find means of surviving in the open, without any security.
- 3) In the aftermath of the demolition of their homes, almost 80 per cent of affected persons are not able to go to work, and have thereby lost income and livelihoods. This is especially serious given the dire financial conditions and severe distress of the working poor, especially daily wage earners, as a result of demonetization in India.
- 4) Neither DDA nor SDMC has provided any relief or alternative accommodation to the evicted families. No rehabilitation plans have been discussed with the affected persons. They still have no idea why their homes were demolished in this sudden and brutal manner. They have been left to fend for themselves without any support from the central government.
- 5) People are living out in the open in the cold and fog. Night temperatures in Delhi have fallen to 10 degrees centigrade, which has made the plight of the evicted families even more acute.
- 6) Minimal relief measures have been provided to residents by the Delhi government, but this is insufficient given the extent of their loss and suffering.
- 7) The forced eviction violates multiple human rights of the affected persons, including their human rights to adequate housing, security of the person and home, information, food, water, sanitation, work/livelihood, education, participation, and health. It also violates their right to life.

8) The forced eviction and demolition of homes by DDA and SDMC in Kishangarh contravene national and international law and norms, including the United Nations (UN) Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement.

*Arjun Mahta*, an evicted person, stated that after the demolition, many residents who work as daily wage labourers have lost their livelihoods, as they are worried for their security and are forced to stay away from work in order to retrieve their belongings from the debris. *Aayanal Sheikh*, a domestic worker living at the site, said that since the government did not provide any notice, most of the women, including her, were at work during the demolition. She also said that due to demonetization, she has not been paid any wages. She is unsure how her family will survive now that they have also lost their home.

*Abdul Shakeel*, Campaign Coordinator at Housing and Land Rights Network, reported that, “The living conditions of the residents, especially after the eviction, are abysmal. They are out in the open without sufficient tents for shelter or facilities to cook. There are no toilets, as a result of which they are forced to defecate in the open. There is also no sewer line or electricity or water connection. This is a health and safety concern for women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.”

After visiting the site and assessing the situation, Housing and Land Rights Network would like to make the following recommendations to the government:

- 1) Immediately provide emergency relief, shelter, cooked food, clothing, blankets, water, and medical supplies to the people rendered homeless by DDA and SDMC.
- 2) Make public the reason for the demolition of homes, including a copy of the demolition order.
- 3) Provide adequate compensation to affected persons for losses incurred as a result of the eviction.
- 4) Enable affected persons to rebuild their homes at the same site with the provision of adequate basic services, including water, sanitation, and electricity. Build separate public toilets for women, children, men, and persons with disabilities.
- 5) Ensure that support is provided to children who have been forced to drop-out of school after the demolition of their homes. Provide free school uniforms, school books, and other study material that was destroyed during the demolition.
- 6) Ensure that no further evictions are carried out in Kishangarh.
- 7) Issue an order imposing a moratorium on evictions across the country, particularly during winter.
- 8) Implement national and international law, and the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement.

According to *Shivani Chaudhry*, Executive Director of Housing and Land Rights Network, “It is a matter of great concern when the government, entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding citizens’ rights and welfare, destroys homes that people have built over years of hard work and incremental investment, and renders them homeless without any recourse or access to remedy, especially during the cold winter. How can the government be committed to providing ‘housing for all by 2022,’ if it demolishes existing homes of lower income groups? The state must take immediate measures to provide restitution to affected persons, take action against officials violating the law and legally-guaranteed human rights, and stop all evictions across the country.”

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