



HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK

***** PRESS RELEASE*****

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At a press conference in Delhi today, *Apne Aap Women Worldwide* (AAWW) and *Housing and Land Rights Network* (HLRN) launched a report titled, **From Deprivation to Destitution: The Impact of Forced Eviction in Topsia, Kolkata.**

The report, which documents the human rights violations and losses incurred by persons impacted by a forced eviction in Kolkata, was released by Ms Mumtaz Begum—an affected woman from Topsia—along with human rights activists (Mr Harsh Mander, Ms Anuradha Talwar, Ms Tinku Khanna, and Ms Shivani Chaudhry).

The speakers at the launch strongly condemned the forced eviction of 383 low-caste Muslim families (approximately 2,000 people) that was carried out without due process between 10 and 12 November 2012, by Kolkata government authorities for the construction of a nine-kilometre long flyover. The government offered the affected families a paltry sum of Rs 12,000 as compensation. After the eviction, 10 children and one woman went missing, and one woman was murdered. While nine children have been traced, one girl is still missing. In the absence of any resettlement, the evicted families have been rendered homeless or forced to make their own alternative arrangements. Displaced persons have lost access to livelihoods, healthcare, food, and education. In the aftermath of the eviction, many children have been forced to drop out of school and the community's standard of living has declined considerably. The vulnerability of girls and women to violence, sexual harassment, abuse, and trafficking has increased. Many families have been forced into debt bondage, child marriage, child labour, and sex-trafficking. Despite concerted advocacy attempts with the government to get adequate compensation and rehabilitation, more than three years after the eviction the affected families have not received any relief from the state.

The demolition of homes and forced eviction of the families in Topsia has resulted in the violation of multiple human rights of the affected persons, including their human rights to adequate housing, food, water, sanitation, health, work, education, security of the person and home, and information.

Given the gross human rights violations before, during, and after the forced eviction in Topsia, Kolkata, AAWW and HLRN carried out a detailed eviction impact assessment to determine the real

costs and losses suffered by the affected families, as a result of their forced eviction. The study used HLRN's **Eviction Impact Assessment Tool** and incorporated elements of AAWW's Last Girl Asset-based Tool in order to quantify the community's losses. The study reveals that the community lost personal possessions and property in the amount of **at least Rs 10,000,000 (1 crore)**.

At the launch event, **Mumtaz Begum**, working with Apne Aap Women Worldwide as a community mobiliser in Topsia, strongly stated, *"I have no problem with the construction of a new flyover. In fact, I am happy that it'll make transportation more convenient. However, I would also like the government to give us justice, as we are also citizens of Kolkata. I've been living in this city for more than 30 years, and I deserve to live in a dignified manner. Now our entire community has been scattered and exposed to all kinds of ill treatment."*

Tinku Khanna, Director, Apne Aap Women Worldwide, said that, *"The forced eviction has resulted in loss of life, liberty, legal protection, housing, education, livelihood, food, and medicine, for more than 2,000 people. Its impact has been an increase in debt, debt bondage, child marriage, child labour, human trafficking as well as deterioration of physical and mental health. A holistic approach that links different departments, such as women and child, social welfare, education, police, is needed. Schemes need to be linked. The government must also identify those who are most likely to be trafficked and map them."*

According to **Anuradha Talwar**, a social activist and campaigner with the Right to Food Network, *"The party that came into power fighting against land acquisition, is using illegal means to acquire the land where the poorest people live."*

Harsh Mander, Director, Centre for Equity Studies, and Special Commissioner to the Supreme Court in the right to food case highlighted the increased impoverishment of the poor by the state and lamented the persistent apathy and lack of concern for their living conditions and human rights.

Shivani Chaudhry, Executive Director, Housing and Land Rights Network, asserted that, *"It is indeed a tragedy and an indication of gross state neglect that the families evicted from Topsia have still not received any justice for the violation of their human rights before, during and after their forced eviction in November 2012. The need for a comprehensive state policy to prevent evictions and to provide adequate reparation is glaring. We hope that this eviction impact assessment study, which documents the severe and long-lasting effects and costs of the eviction, especially on women and children, is incorporated into state policy and those guilty for the violations of human rights are tried according to the law."*

The report makes recommendations to the Government of West Bengal to restore the rights of the affected persons, and to provide them with adequate compensation and resettlement. The report will be presented to the West Bengal government, and to the National Human Rights Commission and other relevant national human rights institutions. It will also be submitted to the United Nations (UN). Given that the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing is currently on an official mission to India (from 11-22 April 2016) the panellists at the launch event stated that this is an opportune time for the media to report on issues of housing rights violations in the country, especially forced evictions that continue unabated.

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