

PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, September 30, 2010

Protest against Commonwealth Games held in Delhi

The '*Anti Commonwealth Games Front*' organized a public meeting and protest against the Commonwealth Games at Jantar Mantar, Delhi, today.

The Front has been formed by a number of organizations and civil society groups which are against the Commonwealth Games (CWG) being hosted in Delhi. Although the member organizations and groups work in diverse areas and have been opposing the games for different reasons, they are unanimous in their criticism of the violation of human rights that the city of Delhi has seen in the run up to the Games, the rampant corruption and financial mismanagement, and also in their perception of the Games as a complete waste of the country's precious resources, an extravaganza which a poor country like India cannot afford and should not host.

The Front protested the Commonwealth Games on the following grounds:

1. In the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, the city has seen the most blatant violation of human rights of the urban poor.
 - Around 200,000 – 250,000 people have been rendered homeless and had their homes demolished due to the Games.
 - Destitute persons ('beggars') have been rounded up from the streets. Additional police force has been sought to "catch them all." Many 'beggars' have been sent back to their home states after serving prison sentences. They are being hidden away in parks because the Delhi government does not want foreigners to see Delhi's poor. The *Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959* has been used to arbitrarily arrest and detain the homeless.
 - Migrant workers have been threatened and terrorised to leave the city. Domestic workers, drivers, plumbers and other workers are being packed off to railway stations in an attempt to 'clean-up' the city.
 - 300,000 street vendors have already lost their livelihoods to the Games. Cart-pullers, waste-pickers, head-loaders, balloon sellers, cobblers, street-food vendors and other informal sector workers are being denied their right to work and livelihood. Since they are not able to earn their daily wage, they are starving as they have no money to buy food. All dhabas (eateries) on the Games routes have been closed for security reasons. Weekly markets in the vicinity of stadiums have been banned for the duration of the Games.
 - Workers at the Commonwealth Games construction sites have seen some of the most widespread violation of human rights. The relentless toil of starving labourers has created the new infrastructure in Delhi. But workers have been forced to work day and night, and yet minimum wages and overtime wages have not been paid to them. Some labourers have lost their lives due to the hazardous working conditions. Child labour has also been involved in some Games projects.
 - Women and young girls have been trafficked from other states into Delhi for sex work during the Commonwealth Games.

2. The government has completely lost its sense of priorities. While Rs. 70,000 to 100,000 crore (US\$ 15 – 21 billion) are being spent on hosting a twelve day sporting extravaganza,
 - The budgetary allocation for Indira Awas Yojna (2010-11) is a mere Rs. 10,000 crore; for Rajiv Gandhi Awas Yojana (2010-2011) it is only Rs. 1,270 crore; and for ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) it is Rs. 8,700 crore.
 - The annual budget of Department of Revenue, Government of Delhi for shelters for the homeless has been Rs. 60 lakh for the last 10 years, while crores are being spent on resurfacing and beautification of streets of Delhi. Rs. 24.42 crore are being spent on beautification of Mehrauli Badarpur Road and the per kilometre cost of beautifying Subramania Bharti Marg is Rs. 1.28 crore.
3. India is a poor country and cannot afford this kind of wastage of precious resources.
 - 40% of the world's starvation-affected people live in India.
 - More than 320 million people in India are unable to manage three square meals a day.
 - More than 5,000 children die every day from malnourishment.
 - 5.6 crore children either don't go to school or drop out due to poverty.
4. The claim that by hosting the Commonwealth Games, India's performance in sports will improve, is completely false. For many schools across India a playground is a distant dream for the children. Moreover the plight of most Indian athletes is dismal if not pathetic. India has spent at least Rs. 4500 crore on renovating stadiums for the Games. This money could have been more wisely spent to improve facilities for sportspersons across the country.
5. Residents of Delhi have had to put up with a lot of inconveniences to host an event they were not consulted about and did not ask for. The city residents will eventually pay for this sporting event. The Delhi Government has gone bankrupt because of wanton spending in the name of the Games. The city has become much more expensive and taxes have increased.
6. It has been reported that CWG is being counted as one of the biggest corruption scandals in the country. The government instead of providing accountability for the financial irregularities is focusing its attention on the success of the Games under the garb of 'national pride.' However twisted the understanding of 'national pride' may be, how can Indians support or be enthused about a sporting event that is making a selected few richer?
7. Rs. 744 crore meant for Scheduled Castes in Delhi has been diverted to meet the Games related costs, in complete violation of the Special Component Plan and the 2006 Planning Commission Guidelines.
8. Every decision relating to the Commonwealth Games has been taken in secrecy and in violation of the democratic norms of the country. The permission to bid for the Games was taken under Rule 12 (one line); the decision to hand over the Commonwealth Games Village to Delhi University to be used as a hostel was secretly reversed; the decision to evict students from hostels; the decision to reserve special lanes for CWG participants, was not the result of any democratic procedures.

The protest was held today to also oppose the arrival in Delhi of the 'Queen's Baton' – a historical symbol of oppression and colonization.

Civil society groups and social movements working with the urban poor in Delhi demand full accountability from all agencies and departments involved in the CWG, full public disclosure of funds, transparency of transactions, protection of human rights of Delhi's citizens, compensation for livelihoods lost, adequate rehabilitation of the displaced close to their places of work, a post-Games legacy plan and cost recovery plan, and prosecution of officials responsible for embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds.

Given the gross violations of human rights against Delhi's poor and marginalized groups, several participants at the protest also called for a boycott of the Commonwealth Games on ethical grounds.

Delhi police detained some of the protestors but later released them.

Protesting organizations, among many others, included:

- Samajwadi Jan Parishad – 98686 536 96
- Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) – 99586 25344 / 9818 205234
- Jhuggi Jhopdi Ekta Manch – 9211 661830
- Angaja Foundation – 011- 4164-3401
- Indo German Social Service Society (IGSSS) – 011 4570 5039
- Hazards Centre – 99106 87627
- Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam (NMPS) – 98108 10365
- Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch – 8800631852
- National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM) - 9818905316
- Peoples' Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) - 98103 71257
- University Community for Democracy – 9953034105
- National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
- Beghar Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti – 9211979454
- Delhi Forum
- Mobile Creches
- Commonwealth Games- Citizens for Workers, Women and Children (CWG-CWC)
- Lok Raj Sangathan
- Vidyarthi Yuvajan Sabha
- Krantikari Yuva Sangathan
- Perspectives
- Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR)
- Socialist Party
- Socialist Front
- Socialist Janata Party
- Kishori Yuva Sangathan