



PRESS RELEASE

29 April 2014
New Delhi

Release of a Publication: '**Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless) – The Trajectory of a Struggle**'

At a press conference held in New Delhi on 29 April 2014, homeless women and men living in different parts of Delhi released a publication titled: '**Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless) – The Trajectory of a Struggle**', in English and Hindi.

The publication documents the story of a long and exacting struggle, spread over a period of more than a decade, by *Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath* (SAM:BKS – Urban Rights Forum: With the Homeless) for the human rights of CityMakers (homeless residents) in the national capital. It highlights the unconstitutional and inhuman treatment of CityMakers and the denial of their human rights. It documents the evolution and work of SAM:BKS, and describes the various strategies it has used over the years. At the press conference, housing rights activists and members of SAM: BKS, including the homeless, shared experiences of their work and struggle.

Ashok Pandey, a SAM:BKS member from *Beghar Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti* (BMSS), recounted the evolution of SAM:BKS and stressed how the Forum has strengthened the movement of the homeless in Delhi, and given them opportunities and spaces for advocacy and action to advance their human rights.

Poonam Devi, a homeless woman from Pul Mithai, spoke about multiple evictions that the residents of Pul Mithai have witnessed over the years. She mentioned how being a part of SAM:BKS had helped them to resist these evictions, to fight for their rights, and to raise their concerns with responsible authorities, including the police.

Abdul Shakeel, a SAM:BKS member and an activist working for the human rights of the homeless, stated how being a part of SAM:BKS has helped the homeless get entitlements such as voter cards, ration cards, labour cards, and health insurance. It has also empowered CityMakers and helped them gain awareness about their rights as well as available schemes in Delhi that they could access.

Shivani Chaudhry (Executive Director, Housing and Land Rights Network and SAM:BKS Executive Committee member), said the publication marks a significant moment in the struggle of SAM:BKS. Since the inception of SAM:BKS in 2008, members have worked at multiple levels to mobilise the homeless; engaged in direct action, networking and media advocacy; and used the judicial process to promote the human rights of Delhi's CityMakers. Through SAM:BKS, issues of police brutality and violence against homeless women, have also been brought to the attention of the High Court of Delhi and national human rights institutions. While the Forum has made some progress, the lack of political will in the government to develop durable solutions for homelessness and the flagrant violation of orders of the High Court of Delhi, continue to be enormous challenges. She mentioned that in the next phase of its struggle, SAM:BKS would engage more actively with state institutions and agencies, including Delhi Legal Services Authority (DLSA), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Commission for Women (NCW), National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), and Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR), to ensure the realisation of the human rights of CityMakers.

Indu Prakash Singh (National Convenor, National Forum for Housing Rights and Executive Committee Member, SAM:BKS) said the publication is an ode to the resolve of CityMakers and also the media. He said that without active media support, the High Court's *suo moto* intervention on the homeless shelter issue would not have come about. He stated that though they were working with CityMakers since 1999 and had media support, with the creation of SAM:BKS, their combined action bore greater results. SAM:BKS has recommended short and long-term measures to address homelessness in Delhi and submitted them to the government and to the High Court of Delhi. The consistent efforts of SAM:BKS have brought about several positive changes, including the creation of 84 permanent and 146 temporary, 24-hour shelters for the homeless in Delhi. It is, however, important for the government to urgently ensure that Delhi has sufficient permanent shelters to accommodate the entire homeless population of over 150,000. These shelters must meet international human rights standards of adequacy, as proposed by SAM:BKS in its long-term plan document.

SAM:BKS hopes that this publication will serve as a guide for the homeless and organizations working for their human rights in other cities to develop similar platforms, to learn from the successes and challenges, to lead their own movements, and to advocate for their human rights.

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Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath (SAM:BKS) is a Delhi-based collective of over 20 organizations and social movements, including homeless residents. SAM:BKS works to promote and protect the rights of the homeless residents, as guaranteed by the Constitution of India and international human rights instruments, and to ultimately secure adequate housing for all homeless residents. For more information, please write to: shahriadhikarmanch@gmail.com