

GHAR BACHAO GHAR BANAO ANDOLAN

(Affiliated to the National Alliance of People's Movements and the National Urban Development Struggle and Action Committee)

Report of the First Convention held on June 2nd, 2008 Azad Maidan, Mumbai

- Challenging the State's hypocrisy: A booklet 'Who are the Encroachers in Mumbai' and a periodical 'Andolan Ki Awaaz' released amidst resolution to strengthen the struggle of urban poor for justice and dignity.
- What right do governments have to demolish our homes? echoes the question.
- Thousands of urban poor- un-protected workers, fisherfolk, slum dwellers, street vendors of Mumbai assemble on the occasion of the first convention of Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan.

On June 2nd, thousands of urban poor of Mumbai representing more than 7000 members of Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan converged at Azad Maidan to participate in the first convention of the Andolan. Women in large numbers and in majority, attended the convention that began at noon went on till 7 p.m. to discuss and strategise on issues ranging from right to housing to the encroachments of the elite, right to basic services including water, health, education and food, and the obstacles in realising the same. The Convention had attendance of unorganised sector workers, slum dwellers, fish workers, hawkers, and infrastructure project affected persons.

The convention was inaugurated by Justice (Retd.) Suresh H, and addressed by Laxman Gaikwad-leader of the Denotified Tribes, Medha Thatte_(Shramik Mahila Sangathan, Pune), Neera Adarkar(Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti), Shailesh Gandhi(NCPRI) Right to Information Activist, Shaktiman Ghosh(National Hawkers' Federation), Seemantani Dhuru(Avehi-Right to Education Campaign), Adv. Shakeel Ahmed, Neha(CEHAT), Anand Patwardhan (Documentary Maker), Sambaji Bhagat (Cultural Activist), Medha Patkar (Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan- NAPM, NBA) and others.

While inaugurating the convention Justice Suresh raised the question 'what right does governments have to demolish the houses of the poor when right to housing is part and parcel of Right to Life guaranteed under the Constitution of India?' He declared the policy of Government of Maharashtra of applying cut-off date as inhuman, illegal as well as violation of the Constitution. He gave the call of raising struggles at multiple fronts to oppose the anti-people policies of present day governments, be it setting up of SEZs or repeal of Urban Land Ceiling Act.

His call for struggle was seconded by Laxman Gaikwad, leader-activist associated with the de-notified tribes of Maharashtra. He drew the attention of those present towards the irony of how historically and even today, those who are earning their bread-butter by engaging in back breaking labour are labeled as criminals and encroachers, while those who are real criminals are holders of sets of power as MPs, MLAs and corporate heads.

Neera Adarkar, an advocate supporting the millworkers denounced the Government's policy to misuse and misappropriate mill land neither caring for the heritage nor the

labourers. She spoke for the struggle by slums against the elitist urban renewal which is inequitous.

Raising the issue of real encroachers of Mumbai, a booklet 'Who Are the Encroachers in Mumbai' was released on the occasion by Medha Thate. The booklet contains detailed cases of the encroachments of the elite over lands in Mumbai. The quoted cases include those of Atria Shopping Mall constructed by encroaching over land reserved for housing the dis-housed, 60 storied twin towers- illegally constructed over land reserved for a 12 meter wide road; scam of Hiranandani Gardens for which 230 acres of land has been leased out at the rate of 40 paise per acre. After the release of the booklet, members of Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan resolved to enter upon one of these encroachments and demand their removal in near future. A fortnightly 'Andolan Ki Awaaz' was also released during the sammelan which will be regularly brought out by the Andolan.

Medha Thatte narrated the situation in Pune slums and exposed the builder prone development which is taking a toll of poor people's housing and infrastructure both, and appealed for the unity of the secular forces.

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The issue of Hawker's & Street Vendors was raised by Shaktiman Ghosh of National Hawkers Federation who lambasted the UPA government and respective state governments of not implementing the National Street Vendors & Hawkers Policy in spite of the orders of the Supreme Court. He drew attention towards the exploitation and harassment that the hawkers have to face even in left ruled state of West Bengal. Hyder Imam of Pheriwala Vikas Sangthana, an affiliate organisation of the Andolan drew attention towards the fact that everyday, lakhs of rupees was being collected from hawkers of Mumbai by the nexus of Police-Municipal Authorities-Politicians who are violating the citizens' right to life. While on the lands reserved for hawkers as retail markets are being encroached by the builder mafia as in Walkeshwar where a 40 storied building has been illegally constructed or be it the case of McDonalds Restaurant outside VT Station which has been challenged by Sangthana in the High Court, two sets of laws are being applied; one for the rich and other for the poor.

Urban Poor's right to basic services like housing, water, health, education and food was asserted by speakers like Sailesh Gandhi, Neha, Semantani Dhuru, Mahatam Mouraya, Kausalya Salvi, [MajuMajnu Varghese](#), Prabjot Kaur and others. Rights of these services were forcefully reiterated by the slogans of thousands of members of the Andolan that were present for the Sammelan. Role of financial institutions and corporates like World Bank, ADB, McKinsey International, Reliance, in encroaching and violating the constitutional and human rights of urban poor like during the implementation of Bank funded MUTP or drafting Vision Mumbai statements, was exposed in speech Role of the National Alliance of People's Movements & the National Urban Development Struggle & Action was highlighted as GBGBA is allied with both.

Advocate Shakeel Ahmed, Advocate Khaiyyam, Advocate Rahul Gupta and Advocate Raman were facilitated for their support to the cause. A wooden momentum of GBGB Andolan crafted by Basti activists was presented to all the guests.

In the afternoon a delegation from the Sammelan went and met the Chief Minister, Shri Vilas Rao Deshmukh. He was made aware of the issues being raised by those present and asked to give a date on which there could be a conclusive meeting, this demand was accepted and in the next few days such a meeting would be taking place.

A multipronge programme announced by Medha Patkar included,

a) enquiry through people's committees' of the municipal and private schools and public hospitals. In the poor localities in Mumbai.

b) investigation into the corruption and legal violation in Slum Rehabilitation Scheme- case by case through an, Expert Committee and challenging illegalities and the culprit through mass and legal action.

c) Work or **close down agitations at** rationing offices to question inaction And corruption and noncompliance with Supreme Court orders on Right to Food.

d) Pursuing cases against “Encroachments by the elites” such as the Atria Shopping Mall, 60 storied building, “Evict the Encroachers.

e) Demanding land for self-reliant housing project under the Central Govt. Scheme for Mandala community.

f) Supporting the relay fast by the Mithi river project which is to begin soon.

g) Gheroing the elected representatives beginning with the corporate to get the work done on various aspects.

h) Continuing to challenge the regional politics, which is unconstitutional instigated by “Maharashtra Navnirman Sena” and initiating legalisation if the Home Ministry does not follow the orders by the State Human Rights Commission.

The Sannelan ended with those present taking a pledge to continue with their struggle of renewing cities based on the principle of equity and justice with renewed vigor and strength. Membership drive would continue and committee for each sector would be formed during the general body meeting to be held within 2 months, it was declared. The accounts of GBGB were briefly presented and a balance of Rs 4 lacs it was approved by all, would be kept in the name of a special committee declared.

Pledge taking was followed by reciting of revolutionary songs by famous singer Sambaji Bhagat and screening of a documentary film by Anand Patwardhan. Several advocates, students, teachers and representatives of other social organizations attended the sannelan that went on till 9 p.m. in the night.

Siraj, Mohan Chavan and Simpreet Singh compered the convention.

Santosh Thorat, Nasreen Bano, Mahatam Mouraya, Hyder Imam, Mukta Srivastava, Pervin Iyunkar, Simpreet Singh, Nirmala, Amit Maru, Mohan Chavan, Zia Choudhary, Bhanu Das Kale, Medha Patkar.