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## **EXCELLENT RESPONSE FOR WALK TO RECLAIM BENGALURU**

Hundreds turned up at Lal Bagh West Gate today to participate in the **Walk to Reclaim Bengaluru** organised under the aegis of *Hasiru Usiru* a network of community organisations, residents associations, project affected communities, voluntary organisations and individuals concerned about protecting equitable access to public social spaces such as roads and parks in Bengaluru. Gracing the occasion were Mr Dinesh Gundu Rao (MLA, Gandhinagar), Ms. Premila Nesargi, Former Chairperson of the Karnataka Women's Commission. The Walk was also endorsed by Prof. B. K. Chandrashekar, former Chairman of Karnataka Legislative Council, Justice A. J. Sadashiva (Retd.), Mr. Chiranjiv Singh, IAS Retd. (former Addl. Chief Secretary), Mr. N. A. Haris (MLA, Shantinagar) and several other eminent persons who could not be present due to prior commitments.

Children, cyclists, senior citizens, community organisations, concerned individuals marched on from Lal Bagh West Gate to Town Hall holding colourful posters and shouting slogans against the unlawful widening of roads and the illegal implementation of the Metro in the city of Bangalore. Several demanded that these projects be suspended as they violate all legal norms and more importantly are likely to damage the city, livelihoods and its streets in the most irrevocable manner. Others urged the government to ensure public involvement in the process of planning and decision making.

Signing an appeal to the Chief Minister of Karnataka Shri. Yeddyrappa, the endorsers urged him to seriously consider the implications of these infrastructure projects, which will affect thousands of lives, property, trees, public spaces and everyone's right to street space.

Speaking to those gathered Leo Saldanha, the coordinator Environment Support Group said that, "The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka held in a PIL filed by Environment Support Group and ors. (WP 7107/2008) that such projects would have to conform with the law, respond to public interest objectives and involve the public in decision making prior to implementing these projects. To ensure these objectives were met the Hon'ble High Court appointed a committee of experts under the Chairmanship of Mr. Yellappa Reddy. Minutes of the Committee's proceedings are ample proof that the parameters set out by the Hon'ble Court have not been met, yet the projects are being implemented."

Addressing the crowd Mr. Dinesh Gundu Rao (MLA, Gandhinagar) said "Higher officials decide without taking into account general public opinion and consent. Decisions should be taken by talking to all concerned people, and experts of the field. Public parks like the Lal Bagh are sacred spaces and the bureaucracy is destroying these monuments without paying any heed to the people's concerns.

Ms. Premila Nesargi, Former Chairperson of the Karnataka Women's Commission, explained that the Metro is illegal and there is no law supporting its construction. She also said that it was a great tragedy that people were being kept out of the planning processes deliberately.

Shri. Rajeev Gowda, Prof Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) said that one recognises that there is crisis of urbanisation. What is important is to realise that instead of succumbing to it one must include people and keep their interests

in the centre of every project that is being undertaken. Projects like these fundamentally alter lives and livelihoods. Decisions should not be made in such autocratic manner.

Kathyayini trustee of CIVIC Bangalore emphasised that the government should keep in mind what has been laid out in the National Urban Transport Policy. She also said that the government must keep in mind the needs of the common man.

After the walk ended in Town Hall, the crowd shout slogans and decided to carry forward their demand for public involvement in decisions that affect the city by gathering again on 29<sup>th</sup> November. Affected communities from Avenue Road, Chamrajpetta, Infantry Road, CMH road have also confirmed that they will carry on this demand in their respective areas.

For Hasiru Usiru

Divya Ravindranath

Campaigner

Environment Support Group

105, East End B Main Road, Jayanagar 9th Block East, Bangalore 560069. INDIA

Tel: 91-80-22441977/26531339, Voice/Fax: 91-80-26534364

Email: [esg@esgindia.org](mailto:esg@esgindia.org)/[esgindia@gmail.com](mailto:esgindia@gmail.com)

Web: [www.esgindia.org](http://www.esgindia.org)