

HASIRU USIRU

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**Alternative Law Forum, Equations, CIVIC, Open Space,
Environment Support Group, SICHREM, Samvada, Arkavathy
Kumudavathy Punaschethana Samithi, The Other Media**

PRESS RELEASE

20th June 2008

**Reg: Formation of Human Chain at Agara Lake, on 22nd June 2008 as a
symbolic protest against the ongoing Privatization of Lakes in Bangalore**

We are organizing a symbolic protest against the privatization of lakes in Bangalore by forming a Human Chain at Agara Lake, Koramangala (Bangalore) at 11 AM on Sunday, 22nd June 2008. Though we object to the Lake Development Authority's move to privatize lakes, we are keen to assist the Government of Karnataka and its agencies in all other rational interventions that will ensure the protection and sustenance of our lakes systems.

The Lake Development Authority plans to 'develop' lakes in Bangalore, by handing it over to private parties. Already, four prime water bodies - Agara Lake, Hebbal Lake, Vengaihana Kere and Nagawara Lakes have been leased out to commercial entities for a period of 15 years.

Incidentally, these lakes were comprehensively de-silted, restored and rehabilitated by grants from the Norwegian Government under the Indo-Norwegian Project and the National Lake Conservation Programme of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. As a result these lakes are fantastic water bodies and excellent habitats for birds - both migrating and local. In addition they support a wide diversity of flora and fauna, and support the livelihoods of tens of fishing families. Hebbal Lake particularly has been repeatedly proposed for conservation as a bird refuge, and its watershed as a Regional Park (refer the report of the Lakshman Rau Committee Report 1988).

We sincerely believe that it is an unnecessary and damaging investment to now lease out these very lakes for advancing commercial interests. For 'development' after privatization involves introduction of restaurants, kiosks, boating, water sports, jetty etc, as it has already been seen in the case of the Nagawara Lake by Lumbini Gardens Pvt Ltd, and by M/s Par C Systems in the case of Vengaihana Kere. We are deeply distressed by this development as we find this unethical and counter to the objective of environment conservation and maintenance of lakes as our public commons. The kind of activities that have been allowed distance visitors from nature, and feed into a consumerist culture that we could well do without. From the instances of Vengaihana & Nagawara tanks, it is well demonstrated that such development is inimical to preserving the tanks as a wetland habitat for birds and other aquatic life.

These lakes have been intensively used by all local residents and the general public for various purposes. While Agara is being used for walking, jogging and recreational purposes, Hebbal Lake has been used for customary and traditional occupations like fishing, grazing and irrigation. In addition, birdwatchers have been visiting these

wetland habitats regularly. Privatizing these commons is a deathblow to peoples' right to access open spaces.

We strongly feel that lakes must be maintained as our common heritage, their maintenance undertaken with the cooperation of local communities and no activity inconsistent with the traditional and specific use of the water bodies should be allowed now or in the future.

We request you to kindly depute a reporter to cover this event on Sunday. We will be very grateful if you could introduce an advance article on this protest to build awareness amongst your readers on this issue.

For Hasiru Usiru

Bhargavi Rao

Divya Ravindranath

Address for Communication:
105, East End 'B' Main,
Jayanagara 9th Block,
Bengaluru-560069
Phone: 22441977/26531339