



Mr Chander, you are familiar with the issue of forced eviction, since you are currently supporting 70 families forced to leave the ground where they had settled in Punjab, North of India. On Behalf of Planète Enfants : could you please introduce your organisation?

Planète Enfants has celebrated its tenth anniversary, and is active in two districts of Punjab. Our Committee is located in Switzerland, where it raises the funds necessary for our action. Of these two Punjab projects, the one is focused on school access for about 200 children, and the other reaches out to the whole population of a slum on the outskirts of the city of Jallander. Seventy families, 1'000 people altogether, live there. They came there after several decades of roaming about : they originally come from Mumbai, 3'000 km south. Being repeatedly chased is not an uncommon lot in India for people excluded due to the system of castes or due to discrimination based on ethnic origin.

From the numerous children of this population, 30 are now attending regularly the school that we have set up. There they learn Punjabi (a language they did not master) and English. Sanitary conditions have also been improved, thanks to a water pump.

Yet, in spring 2007, they received the order to evacuate the ground, targeted by enlarging construction work on the nearby motorway. Planète Enfants reacted and issued an urgent appeal : thanks to generous donors, it could by a 8'000 m2 ground.

Apparently, their case is not an isolated one...

As you say : the enlarging of this famous road has already turned many a life upside down : the dwellers of a slum on the outskirts of Kapurthala, in the district of the same name, saw its 135 "houses" torn down! Now the families live on the streets, in makeshift shelters. They gather and pile up the bricks of their former lodgings, not knowing where and when they will be able to use them again. As always happens, no solution to their housing problem has been proposed!

From December to February, temperatures in Punjab are very low. These people, old and young, are left to sleep outside, sometimes even on the ground, in a temperature varying from 1° and 5°!

What are the projects of Planète Enfants on the new ground?

Planète Enfants will provide for the construction of three-storey houses, of a school, of a healthcare centre equipped with water and electricity. We will involve the beneficiaries in a participative approach. In return, they will have to commit themselves to live in their house sustainably, it will be forgiven to sell or hire it.

A small plot of land will be devoted to subsistence farming. Our vision is a global perspective, exploiting renewable energy (windmills), and recycling. To secure social inclusion, we will create job opportunities for the slum-dwellers, to give them a way out of this cycle of misery and begging. Of course, we have strong faith in the children : they will be the levers of this transformation, and the guardians of the vision of our organisation.

We have to provide them taste for life and self-esteem. Uneducated people in India are often mesmerized by religion : they think that living in the slum is a punishment for a bad karma.

Interview by G. Levine, Nov. 25th 2008.

See : www.planeteenfants.org