

Letter to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi

Subject: Promoting Future Slums – Handover of 6,000 tenements built by MMRDA at Mankhurd, Mumbai

Dear Mrs.Soniaji,

You will be in the city on December 20, 2005 to handover 6,000 tenements built by MMRDA at Mankhurd for project affected persons (PAPs) slum-dwellers.

Mindless architecture of this Mass Housing promoted by the MMRDA and built over large tracks of land at Mankhurd for the slum-dwellers being displaced due to various projects promotes an extremely oppressive living environment thus slumming our city further.

We sincerely urge you to understand the issues involved as under :-

(1) Lack of Planning :

6,000 tenements will house nearly 30,000 people. The development at Mankhurd has no provision for social amenities and infrastructure like schools, medical centers, markets, various services etc. Needless to say that the development does not have community open-space and playgrounds.

As per Urban Development Plans & Implementation guidelines (UDPFI), Ministry of Urban Affairs and Employment, Government of India a 30,000 population settlement must include 12 primary schools, 4 secondary schools, 2 dispensaries, about 250 shops and 15% to 20% of the total land area as public open-space, besides spaces between buildings. These standards are similar as in T.P.

The UDPFI guidelines also specify a maximum density of 120 (600 people) dwelling units per Hectare. The slum redevelopment authority norms demand a minimum density of 500 tenements (2500 people) per Ha. While rehabilitation projects for slum-dwellers as the Mankhurd project has about four times the density than specified in the UDPFI standards. [Compare this with MIG & HIG Hsg. Density]. In Mumbai's suburbs where the FSI is one. 1 Ha land can have a total B.U area of 10,000 sq.mts. for MIG housing (average house area of 60 M²) having about 165 houses (825 population) and therefore a density of 165 tenants / Ha For HIG housing (avg. house area being 100 M²) we can build about 100 houses (500 population) and therefore a density of 100 tenants /Ha. Setting-up these schemes in any part of the city without including the various amenities and open-spaces promotes a big imbalance of social infrastructure and amenities in the area leading to further deterioration of living conditions in the various parts of the city. As a result of such rehab projects as the one in Mankhurd, the slum dwellers will live forever without having open-spaces, without adequate health care and without their children having access to schools . Such short-sighted and oppressive housing models as developed by MMRDA at Mankhurd and other parts (including by part developers) contributes to the underdevelopment of our people and the city.

Layout of the various housing blocks are monotonous without adequate open-space between them - Seven storied buildings just 3 mtrs. apart from one and other. Light, ventilation and privacy are not considered important. In the Mankhurd project long central corridors having width of 4' to 5 feet provides access to the tenements on either side. This is worse than existing slums where only ground storied or at the most G+1 storied houses have access from an average 4 to 5 feet wide gullies

What is seriously lacking is comprehensive planning and the implementation of the various planning and development standards. In fact the government and its various agencies have relinquished their responsibility of planning for the city. Developments are individual, disparate, competing, even contradicting one another, thus slumming our city under the guise of “development”. That a high quantum of building activity cannot be considered as achievements nor seen as progress made.

(2) Adverse social impact and lack of participation :

MMRDA has unilaterally designed and built this cluster of buildings without any discussion with the affected slum-dwellers who will occupy these buildings. We as citizens of Mumbai are deeply concerned about the adverse social and cultural impact these developments will have on the majority population. More-over, far from removing slums, we will face serious consequences in the future in terms of the adverse social and environmental impact this will have. These developments will be a greater liability in the future.

Such models of development must be immediately halted as it is being replicated at many many places. Housing must be seen centrally as an environmental issue and not limited to merely real estate interest of maximizing the built-up area on any given land. It is important to realize that we are fighting slum-like conditions having inadequate open-spaces, services, social amenities, safe accesses, sewage, storm-water disposal and solid-waste management in which over 5.5 million people of our city live. The last issue in my view in the eradication of slums is the housing typology, the type of materials used and construction technology employed. Merely replacing structures in the slum that are built with recycled materials, though many are also built with bricks and cement by the people themselves and replace them with multistoried buildings does not help in eradicating the slum like conditions that exist.

Slum-dwellers cannot be forced into buildings that will in future be counter productive to their housing interest and healthy community living. Comprehensive planning of resettlements must provide adequate open-spaces, social amenities and infrastructure and importantly account for its impact on the services and infrastructure in the surrounding area and neighbourhoods, if we want our city to be ridden of slums.

(3) Need for intervention :

We as citizens of the city would like you Mrs. Gandhi to critically evaluate the Mankhurd project in the light of the above concerns and not be led by short-sighted government officials and agencies to proudly inaugurate and hand-over such oppressive living quarters. Instead please insist that such schemes must mandatorily include necessary social amenities, open-spaces and infrastructure as per planning standards, considered as integral aspects of the development. The developer may therefore be granted necessary concessions and or benefits as is being derived from the construction of free houses for the slum-dwellers under the SRA.

We strongly suggest that you should back-out of the grand function at Mankhurd proposed to be held on the 20th of this month and not patronize it.

**P K Das,
Architect-Activist
Mumbai.**