

Press Release

1 February 2015

New Delhi: Residents of Sanjay Colony in Okhla-II assembled today to protest against the shutting down of Deepalaya School in Sanjay Colony and demand that the government allow the school to function by amending the necessary laws.

The event, held within the premises of Deepalaya School which is now functioning as a learning centre having been denied the permission to operate as a school, saw various members of the school voice their disappointment at the school being forced to shut down. Teachers working at Deepalaya, parents of the children who have benefited from Deepalaya and successful alumni who have graduated from the school spoke of the negative impact closing down of the school would have on the colony.

Deepalaya School has been functioning in Sanjay Colony since 1992, educating hundreds of poor children from the slums every year. Since the school does not have title for the land it is operating on, the Delhi government has not provided recognition to the school. According to Right to Education Act of 2009, operating unrecognized schools is illegal. The Save Deepalaya Campaign has been started by India Institute, a not-for-profit research and advocacy organisation. The online campaign on Facebook has received 766 likes and the petition on Change.org has garnered 1113 signatures in just four days. The campaign has also collected 1244 signatures so far on a petition on behalf of the residents of Sanjay Colony.

Speaking at the event, Baladevan Rangaraju, Director of India Institute stressed the importance of evidence-based policy-making. "The intentions on paper and the consequences on the ground will be poles apart. A minimum of 2947 schools have already been shut down, with close to another 14,400 schools issued notices to shut down. This has affected over 1.2 million children. Even as per government data, the RTE will deprive 4.7 million children of their education. Therefore it is important to recognise the contribution of low cost private schools and devise pragmatic recognition procedures that will allow them to continue their services." He said.

Also present at the event was former Principal of Deepalaya School, Shikha Pal, who said, "This school has all the facilities that children will get in any big school, which is otherwise unaffordable for poor children. We have smart classrooms and computers for everyone." Teachers present at the event also spoke movingly about their experience of educating poor children in Deepalaya. Bharati, a teacher at Deepalaya said, "I have been here for 25 years. This job may not pay as much as some others, but it is the most fulfilling job. We have seen so many success stories from here." Parents are angered by the decision of the government. "The government keeps telling us that we should educate our children. But if they shut good schools down, how can we do it?" said Rani Devi, a parent from Sanjay Colony.

The alumni from Deepalaya also spoke about the importance of Deepalaya in their lives. "If it was not for Deepalaya, I would have not been an independent woman today. Deepalaya is everything for me, it is sad to see it struggle for survival." said, Poonam, who went to the US to study on a scholarship and now works as a graphic designer with a tourism company.

For further details, please contact Ramanathan at 8800134040.

<https://www.facebook.com/SaveDeepalayaSanjayColony>