

Interactive session-Social Cohesion- representatives of POC's, Police authorities, Resident Welfare Association, Malviya Nagar

Background:

SLIC jointly with BOSCO and UNHCR organized an interaction session for refugees with police and Residents Welfare Association (RWA) on 31 May 2015 at PS Malviya Nagar. The need was felt for an intervention to reinforce activities geared towards social cohesion for African and other POC's in Delhi, especially amid a recent spate of racially motivated attacks against African nationals in the capital. The meeting was also aimed at building comfort level for the refugees to engage with police whenever required so that eventually they become empowered in legal matters.

The meeting was attended by the Station House Officer (SHO) and the ATO Mr. Lokendra Singh of PS Malviya Nagar, 6 members of the Residents Welfare Association (RWA of Malviya Nagar), representatives of the POC's from Sudan, Somalia, Afghans and Iranians, all residing at Malviya Nagar. SLIC was represented by Belover and Smita, BOSCO by Fatima and Dr. Richa Tyagi and UNHCR by Viniti and Juhi.

Discussions

SLIC and UNHCR gave a briefing on the distinction between asylum seekers, refugees. SHO also reinforced that refugees had to flee from their countries due to compelling circumstances and sometimes without complete documentation. He also explained how they are eligible to apply for long term visa/ stay permit through FRRO. Certain doubts in the minds of the RWA members were clarified. Then, the concerns of RWA and each community were flagged.

Concerns

The biggest problem highlighted by the SHO as well as the RWA members, and agreed to by the POC representatives, especially those from Africa, was that occasionally POC's get targeted as it was very difficult to identify nationalities of perpetrators of crimes when they are of African origin. The police authorities stated that despite working in this area for many years, they are unable to distinguish between different nationalities like the Sudanese, Somalians or Nigerians.



The members of the RWA stated explicitly that they are very welcoming of refugees and understand their plight and problems as they have fled their countries to save their lives. **One**

of them stated, "They are our guest and are most welcomed in our country". However, they had some concerns.

- Lack of respect for Indian culture- life style; loud late night parties, widespread use of drugs and alcohol, skimpily clad women, largely are of African origin, mainly Nigerians but not necessarily refugees.
- They however insisted that even if a local indulges in such a behavior pattern, residents would not tolerate the same.

Other Concerns of POC's:

- Police Verification- Landlords sometime refuse to go with the prospective tenant for police verification, while the police requires both to come together for it. These refugees therefore do not get verified by the police and cannot rent out premises. Sometimes landlords ask the refugees to pay the water and electricity bills for the entire building.

Suggestions:

- UNHCR / Partners should reinforce and scale up the messages of social cohesion, respect towards Indian culture/ social norms at different stages of refugee cycle.
- The RWA asked the refugees to approach them when they face issues related to police verification, inflated water and electricity bills etc. and they would resolve issues with the landlord
- Cultural integration and exchange is necessary for the peaceful co-existence of all communities. Joint meetings; RWA, police authorities, representatives of POC's will be organized on a monthly basis for social cohesion.
- The SHO offered the use of the Malviya Nagar Police Station premises to hold and conduct such and other meetings
- An RWA offered the use of the Malviya Nagar Gurudwara to conduct any community meetings.
- RWA and SHO would be very happy to join the Refugee Day Celebrations in July 2016