

PFF demands 'their' right of fishing in Gizri Creek back

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KARACHI - Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum (PFF) on Tuesday demanded the authorities concerned to get back the right of fishing in Gizri Creek. "The campaign launched for the rights of the fishermen fraternity would never be withdrawn till we get our rights. The rulers had been violating the basic human rights, said PFF chairman Mohammad Ali Shah addressing the agitators and talking to *The Nation*.

On the first day of campaign, the fishermen representative body staged a protest agitation outside Karachi Press Club (KPC) on Tuesday, where several representative of civil society also joined the protest.

The participants chanted slogans and carrying banners and placard in which the slogans inscribed against the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) and chanted slogans in their demand for getting the rights of fishing at the century old fishing points in Girzri area.

In continuity of struggle against the banning of fishermen to anchor their boats at a makeshift jetty in Gizri Creek, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) hundreds of fishermen, women and children had joined the demonstration from Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri Goth, Hacks Bay, Deh Allah Dino, Kiamari, Khada and so on.

Chairperson PFF Mohammad Ali Shah, General Secretary Saeed Baloch, Deputy General Secretary Musrat Mandherio, Vice Chairperson Tahira Ali, Hussian Dhorai and others addressed the gathering. The save fishermen from DHA atrocities', 'save us from hunger and deprivation restore fishermen's basic rights restore our jetty' and 'stop eviction of fishermen' Their slogans were louder and heard at too far.

Addressing the protesters, Mohammad Ali Shah condemned the increasing cruelties of army on fishermen which has forced the fishermen to come on the streets to protect their basic and human rights entitled to them in the constitution of the country, UN' charter of 1948. Shah said precious lands were sold to the DHA at insignificant prices and then sold for millions of rupees to bureaucrats and elites.

DHA is exercising its power in the name of army. Consequently, centuries old residents are the subjects of victimization. Fishermen are banned to catching fish in the sea which is merely the sources of their livelihood and in the given state of poor economy and unemployment if fishermen are deprived of it then there will be no other way to take their rights back except coming on the streets. He added that since 1980 three makeshift jetties in Gizri creek have been demolished.

Now the last one is under the target of the same aggressive course. Shah insisted on the newly elected government representatives, whom fishermen have given their votes, in Sindh and centre that they should take immediate measures to stop DHA for doing unjust with poverty ridden fishermen. Rather removing fishermen's jetty, DHA should be asked to build a proper jetty for fishermen.

He warned the DHA authorities, if they did not end evicting fishermen and removed ban on fishermen to catch fish, then there will be a mass protest all over the Sindh, and will sit on hunger strike in front of DHA. The chairman earlier, talking to *The Nation* that if their prolong problem would not be solved till April-28, so they will cordon off the head office of DHA on April-30. He added that they are holding a seminar in Hyderabad on April-24 (tomorrow) in this regard, in which the representatives of civil societies, political parties and ruling parties are participating.

He said that the century old fishermen villages have been deprived for several decades by the rulers.

They have launched the campaign for the rights of the fishermen and their will never quiet from their struggle since their rights would not be recognized.

Meanwhile, addressing the protest, Hussain Dhorai claimed that he has ownership documents, which were issued to him by the then Mumbai government. But DHA in the name of army has barred them to catch fish in the sea. DHA has gulped nine thousands acres in Gizri while they cannot spare one acre for fishermen who are living in the area for centuries. It is an open injustice. For the last two weeks our families are going through depressed and miserable life. He slammed the DHA who violated an understanding reached between fishermen and DHA in 2005.

Under the agreement, the then DHA administrator had made with fishermen; fishermen were allowed to continue with their fishing activities in the creek from 6am to 6pm.

However, the current administrator refuses to honour the accord on the grounds that there is no reference of a jetty in the agreement. He requested all the civil society members, public, and media personnel, government representatives to come forward and help them to save their only source of livelihood. Otherwise, there are only two ways to go, one, die silently or die on the streets by having lathi and bullets on the chest.

Saeed Baloch declared that PFF for the construction of jetty in Gizri and at other coastal belts of Sindh would expand and speed up the move. These jetties will ensure a permanent and sustainable employment for fishing families.

From now on, PFF will kick off a chain of hunger strikes all over the country and it will go on until fishers' rights on their jetties and other basic and human rights of fishers are not restored.

P.S.

* From The Nation:

<http://www.nation.com.pk/daily/Apr-2008/23/nationalnews11.php>