**All Saints Church Congregation Welfare Association**

No. 28 (Ground Floor), Castle Street, Ashok Nagar, Bangalore 560025

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**We will struggle to secure our Right to Pray in Peace and Tranquility at All Saints Church**

*We urge Bangalore Metro to drop its plans to destroy our church and sacred grove*

Public involvement in decision making is a quintessential aspect of securing sustainable development, as held in the Principle 11 of the Rio Declaration, which India has ratified. In keeping with this international commitment, Indian environmental laws have been amended to ensure that the public affected by development projects, in particular, are involved respectfully throughout the process of decision making. The outcomes, it is hoped, will be in public interest, for now, and into the future.

All Saints Church is a living religious and cultural heritage Bengaluru. This year the congregation is preparing to celebrate the church’s 150th anniversary. When the entire city has got smitten by the craze of ‘developing’ any open space left, All Saints Church congregation has compassionately tended to over 100 trees that form the church’s sacred grove, and created an amazing place for solitude and solace, in the midst of the chaos and busyness of traffic at Vellara Junction. Some of the trees in this grove are older than the church. Birdwatchers have accounted for sighting birds so very rare in such densely urbanized settings, including the Paradise Flycatcher, in this very grove. The State of Karnataka, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, Karnataka Biodiversity Board, Karnataka Forest Department, and just about every public agency must be proud of this achievement and should be extending all help to preserve this space for posterity.

Instead, Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. (Blore Metro) has chosen to use the sacred grove and all the remaining open space around the church to dump its tunneling equipment. Should they succeed, all that will be left would be the church looking like a sore thumb and a stranger in the midst of the chaos of a Metro station.

The undersigned members of the All Saints Church Congregation Welfare Association are joined by hundreds others who cherish this living cultural and religious heritage of Bengaluru, in holding Blore Metro’s efforts to destroy the church’s sacred grove as a direct threat to our fundamental right to worship, which is inextricably intertwined with our Fundamental Right to Life and Liberty (Article 21). We speak on behalf of the entire community of worshippers.

We are most deeply distressed and alarmed that such an attack on our fundamental rights has been planned by Bangalore Metro, and that too secretively, and for at least two years now. *The entire congregation was kept in the dark and we were to learn about the scale of the impact, and its details, only a few months ago.*

We were to learn that Rt. Rev. P K Samuel, Bishop of the Church of South India Karnataka Central Diocese and the Church’s Pastorate Committee have repeatedly appealed to Bangalore Metro and other authorities of the State to drop the idea of damaging (worse destroying in perpetuity) the Church and any of its property (please see enclosed the 21st September 2018 letter of the Bishop to Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB), the 10th April 2019 resolution of the Pastorate Committee and the 16th July 2018 letter to KIADB urging the proposal to use church grounds for metro construction and dumping of material be dropped).

In response, Mr. Ajay Seth, IAS, Managing Director of Bangalore Metro, has written in his 25th May 2019 letter (enclosed) to the Bishop threatening to take over the church property, and permanently too, if the Church refuses to part with the land voluntarily. Rattled by such strong threats, some members have succumbed to pressure and chosen to part with the land temporarily, unknowing that all of this constitutes a serious violations of law and various judicial verdictsm, and amounts to destruction of a biodiversity rich sacred grove.

Almost all of about 1000 members of the All Saints Church congregation are clearly opposed to parting with the church and its sacred grove in any manner, and condemn such threats issued by a senior officer of the Karnataka Government. We hold that this speaks very poorly of the Government of Karnataka’s commitment to uphold everyone’s right to pray without fear, and that too of a minority community.

We gratefully acknowledge the widespread support our struggle has received from across Bengaluru, across India, and abroad as well, to secure All Saints Church in all its glory for posterity. We are hopeful that the church will celebrate its sesquicentennial anniversary (the church was built when Canada as a country was being formed) later this year. We intend to do this in faith, with grace, and by inviting dignitaries such as His Excellency the President of India, His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka, Hon’ble Chief Minister of Karnataka, and various other dignitaries and the wide public from all faiths and creeds.

We remain hopeful that Bangalore Metro and the State Government will revisit its decision to dump its equipment and to drill the tunnel from within All Saints Church. There are clearly viable alternatives, involving far lower capital investment, which also eminently improve the utility of the metro for the wider public use. We, and several others, have already provided these suggestions in meetings with Mr. Seth and his team. Yet, it is deeply distressing that Bangalore Metro is adamant about destroying our Church.

We believe and assert that it is in the fitness of things, and of the law, that Bangalore Metro complies with the directions of the Hon’ble High Court of Karnataka in *Environment Support Group and ors. Vs. BMRCL and ors*, (WP 13241/2009), in *Suo Moto vs. State of Karnataka* (WP 7288/2011), and in *D. T. Devare and anr. Vs. State of Karnataka and ors.,* as also the provisions of the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act, 1961, Karnataka Tree Preservation Act, 1976, the Constitutional 74thg Amendment (Nagarpalika Act), 1992, Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976, and other such applicable law.

In the name of All Saints Church Congregation Welfare Association

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