

**PRESS RELEASE****School Fee Hike: What is the real problem?
Panel discussion on the recent parents – schools deadlock**

In recent months, the hike in the fees charged by private schools, in order to implement the increases in salaries and other benefits as recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission, has fired up parents, civil society organisations and community leaders in to action. The streets of Delhi witnessed numerous protests against the private schools and even the Delhi High Court noted the fee hike to be *prima facie* "highly objectionable". The Delhi Government passed three government orders to control the adverse effects of the controversy and has fixed the amount of fee hike that is permissible. Nevertheless, the issue continues to prolong itself sans resolution, with the Comptroller and Auditor General ordering the audit of accounts of twenty five schools and the Supreme Court's judgment allowing unaided private schools to fix their own fees and use their surplus funds.

School Choice Campaign brought together the fiercest of the spokespersons of the two major parties concerned- the parents and the schools- Mr Surinder Gupta, President, Unrecognised Schools Association, Mr Ashok Aggarwal, Advocate and Advisor, Social Jurist and Mr S L Jain, President, National Progressive Schools Conference during a panel discussion, as part of STUDENT FIRST! Dialogue Series on Quality Education for All on 8 August 2009 at the India Habitat Centre. Other eminent members of the audience present included Prof P V Indiresan, (former Director, IIT Chennai and Padma Bhushan recipient), Ms Annie Koshi (St Mary) and Mr Vijender Gupta (former Chairman of MCD Standing Committee on Education). With the active representation of the Delhi Abhibhavak Mahasangh, other parents associations, public policy experts and school leaders, the discussion entertained all view points.

At the end of the 60 minute discussion, the panelists agreed that there should be greater representation of parents on the schools' Management Committees as well as more transparency in the management of private schools. Together, such reform measures would significantly increase community participation in the local schools and provide parents with a forum to raise their concerns. The discussion forum provided an opportunity for the affected stakeholders to share, deliberate and explore viable solutions. This event was a positive step in the direction of achieving a resolution that serves the best interests of students, schools and society.

The next dialogue is scheduled for 9 September 2009 at the Casuarina Hall, India Habitat Centre from 6:30 – 8:00 pm.

We welcome you to the next dialogue and we solicit your support in taking the message and views of our speakers and the participants to the public at large.

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