August 17, 2012

Dear Prof. Sinha,

**Subject: Exploitation of children by begging mafia**

I am writing to you on behalf of COMMON CAUSE, a civil society organization dedicated to articulating the common problems of the people and securing redress for them. In its espousal of public causes over three decades, Common Cause has used the instruments of policy advocacy and public interest litigation to good effect. Through this letter, I wish to draw your attention to the rampant exploitation of infants by professional beggars and begging mafia all over the country.

An indication of the magnitude of the problem was furnished by an operation mounted in Bangalore toward the end of 2011 in the context of a public outcry against child beggary. The operation was the combined effort of Bangalore city police, Child Welfare Committee, State Departments of Health, Education and Social Welfare and seven NGOs working against human trafficking. According to a news report which appeared in the Dec 13, 2011 issue of Bangalore Mirror under the caption ‘Drugging Kids is Childs Play for Begging Mafia’, 106 infants and an equal number of child beggars between the ages of two and ten were rescued from a well-organized begging mafia during one of the drives under this operation. Many of the rescued children were from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Medical tests confirmed that the infants had been dosed with cough syrup, sleeping pills and injected with narcotic substances. The babies, who were in a state of stupor even three days after their rescue, had been doped with depressants for two reasons: it made the work of the adult beggars much easier and also exerted a stronger pull at the heart strings of the alms-givers. A copy of the report is attached for your reference. **(Annexure 1)**

The prevalence of this barbaric practice in Mumbai was highlighted by DNA, Mumbai in a news report titled ‘Doped babies on rent for begging’, published in its issue of July 17, 2012. It carried heart-rending stories of infants, sometimes as small as two months old, being rented out for begging. More often than not, they were sedated with opium in order to keep them quiet. A copy of the article is attached for your perusal. **(Annexure 2)**

Scenes reminiscent of the appalling situation depicted in these reports from Bangalore and Mumbai are also witnessed at almost every important traffic signal in the National Capital. Most of us have become inured to the sight of young girls, with an outstretched palm and a limp, naked infant on the hip at all times of the year, weaving their way through rows of cars at the red lights.

In order to draw your attention to the plight of such vulnerable children, we have gathered **photographic evidence** from a couple of road intersections in New Delhi of apparently sedated children being used for beggary. Given the magnitude of the problem and our resource constraints, we have not been able to collect evidence from across the state. However, the enclosed photographs should suffice to spur the Commission into action.

We would urge the Commission to undertake a comprehensive inquiry into the ecosystem which enables the begging mafia to operate across the length and breadth of the country and engage in trafficking in small children and infants without let or hindrance. The findings of the investigation should help in devising appropriate remedial and punitive measures to wipe out this shameful blot on our national conscience.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Kamal Kant Jaswal

Director

Prof. Shantha Sinha,

Chairperson,

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights,

5th Floor, Chanderlok Building, 36, Janpath,

New Delhi - 110 001