

## Our coastline under threat



*“The following things are by natural law common to all -- the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the sea-shore. No one therefore is forbidden access to the sea-shore . . . for these are not, like the sea itself, subject to the law of nations. . . . Again, the public use of the banks of a river, as of the river itself, is part of the law of nations; consequently every one is entitled to bring his vessel to the bank, and fasten cables to the trees growing there, and use it as a resting-place for the cargo, as freely as he may navigate the river itself. . . . But they cannot be said to belong to any one as private property, but rather are subject to the same law as the sea itself, with the soil or sand which lies beneath it.”*

*Emperor Justinian  
5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.*

- Dharti (sacred land) is a coalition *“to synergize the diverse capacities of civil society organizations convinced about the centrality of the environmental framework within which all human activity takes place, in order to ensure that all actions undertaken by official and non-official sectors in Sindh, in particular, and in Pakistan, in general, respect the abiding values of ecological sanctity and of human well-being.”*

Membership comprises Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Strengthening Participatory Organization, Baanhn Beli, Shirkatgah, WWF, Women’s Action Forum, Pakistan Maheegir Tehrik, Sahil Bachao, Helpline Trust, Indus Earth, Institute of Architects, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research, Pakistan Women’s Foundation for Peace, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, spearheaded by Naila Ahmed of Shehri.

- In mid-2006, a Dubai-based developer, Limitless of Dubai World, sold a hare-brained scheme, ‘Sugarland City’, to our then PM Shaukat Aziz, who was looking to convert Karachi into a ‘world-class city’ (whatever that means!). The project envisaged the transformation of about 65,000+ acres of land, including Manora, Sandspit, Hawksbay, bounded by the Hub River, Northern Bypass and the Western Backwaters, into *“the most exciting 21<sup>st</sup> century urban quarter in the world”*.
- Shortly thereafter, a video ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzWRhoew2vE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzWRhoew2vE)) of the project was floated. Replete with extravagant buzz-words like *“exciting new waterfront”, “bold new beginning”, “once-in-a-lifetime vacation escape”, “sun-drenched”, “world-class master-plan”, “imaginative architecture”, “590-metre*

*tower*”, and “*leisure and lifestyle amenities*”, the presentation showed fantastic Dubai-like scenes with extensive reclamation of land in the Arabian sea. Details were also posted on the developer’s web-site.

- Based on the federal government’s MOU with Dubai World, the Sindh government machinery was activated to examine premature cancellation of leases, and facilitate allotment of parcels of land to the venture “*which promises to bring large Direct Foreign Investment to Pakistan.*” Beach-hut lessees were served with termination notices by CDGK. To prove transparency and equal access to all, the Sindh government floated a request for ‘Expression of Interest’ in the press in August 2007. As insufficient responses were received, a fresh advertisement was published in November 2007: its fate is not known.
- Concerned citizens and civil society groups in the city reacted strongly to this takeover of the coastline and promotion of a grandiose project that is totally unrelated to the realities of life in Karachi. Adverse news-items and op-ed pieces in the press, letters to the editor, seminars and public statements by politicians, demonstrations by affected fishermen, and court-cases by beach-hut owners began to multiply over the past year.
- On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Dharti conducted a seminar on the threat to the coastline around Karachi. There were four speakers: Dr Ejaz Ahmad of WWF explained the critical need to preserve the biodiversity (flora & fauna) of Sandspit/Hawksbay area, the 1000 acres of dense mangrove forest, and invited citizens to visit the WWF Wetland Centre. Engr. Farhan Anwar of Shehri pointed out that 800 acres around Sandspit/Hawksbay beaches had been notified by the government in 1977 as a ‘wildlife sanctuary’, and the ecosystem is identified as ‘*Wetlands of International Importance*’ in per the ‘*Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*’, to which Pakistan is a signatory; these 20km of beaches, especially a 5-km section, are one of the most important nesting sites in the world for the endangered Green Turtle. Muhammad Hussain of Pakistan Maheegir Tehrik protested the dislocation of fishermen from generations-old coastal villages and the destruction of their means of livelihood.

Arif Belgaumi of the Institute of Architects highlighted the differences between ‘real-estate development’ and ‘sustainable urban development’. He

superimposed the gigantic 80,000+ acre footprint of ‘Sugarland City’ on google-earth layouts of world cities like Beijing, Washington, New York, Lahore, Islamabad, Dubai, Rome and San Francisco and amazed the audience with staggering comparisons. He emphasized that the ‘Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020’, recently approved by the City Council, mandates:

- ✓ against sea-bed reclamation, as it affects harbour regimes and promotes coastline erosion
- ✓ free access of creeks, backwaters and coast to the fishing communities
- ✓ preservation of turtle sanctuaries & mangroves as environmental resources
- ✓ unhindered public access to the beaches, with no development up to 150 metres from the high-water mark
- ✓ reduction of pollution in coastal zones
- ✓ retention of the sea and coast as one of the most valuable assets of Karachi.

➤ The citizens at the seminar passed the following resolution:

*“The Dharti coalition of concerned citizen groups resolves that any development, especially along the coastline, shall be carried out in line with the principles given below. Consequently, the ‘Sugarland City’ project at Hawksbay/Sandspit, which is in violation of these standards, is opposed.*

- 1) *The common-law ‘Public Trust Doctrine’, which mandates free and unfettered access to the shores of the sea for citizens to facilitate fishing, swimming, navigation, recreation, etc. for all, must be respected.*
- 2) *The rights of the local fishing communities along the coast cannot be compromised under any circumstances.*
- 3) *There must be an EIA and public hearings on all waterfront development projects.*
- 4) *Any extravagant development on the sea-shore (private beaches, expensive recreation, etc) which is meant only for the rich will be opposed. People from all socio-economic classes must have unhindered right to use the natural resource of the beach.*
- 5) *The government must frame master plans of the coastal areas to preserve them for our future generations. The greed of builders and developer cannot be allowed to dictate utilization of coastal areas.*
- 6) *Existing residents of the city have the first right to adequate/enhanced basic utilities (water, sewerage, electricity) and infrastructure. Diversion of these resources to high-class coastal development cannot be allowed to rob the citizens of Karachi of their birthright.*
- 7) *The governments, federal, provincial and city, must come clean about the waterfront development projects in all jurisdictions.*
- 8) *Sustainable development must be distributed uniformly across the geographical space, rather than being concentrated along the coast.”*

- The above guidelines apply to all the ambitious, environmentally-unfriendly, so-called development projects along the Karachi coastline, including:
  - ✓ DHA's 14-km '*Waterfront Development Project*'
  - ✓ KPT's '*Port Tower Complex*' involving 190-acre sea-bed reclamation in front of Clifton Blocks-2 & 3
  - ✓ PQA's '*Waterfront Development Project*', establishment of industrial plants along the Bin Qasim shoreline, and construction of '*Diamond Bar City*' on Bundal/Buddoo Islands
  - ✓ CDGK's unplanned increase in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) up to 1:9 for buildings along the Clifton beachfront in order to project a Dubai-like shoreline.
  
- Karachi has already grown too large and is drowning in its effluents and pollution. Law-and-order problems increase proportionately with the population, and with the increasing discrepancy between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. As pointed out by a participant in the seminar, Islam teaches that human habitations must not be made too large: a new, separate habitation must be established when the previous one has expanded to the extent that people no longer recognize one another.
  
- We cannot afford to emulate Dubai, nor should we want to. WWF's '*Living Planet Report 2006*' ([assets.panda.org/downloads/living\\_planet\\_report.pdf](https://assets.panda.org/downloads/living_planet_report.pdf)) shows that the "*ecological footprint*" of many countries and of the entire world far exceeds their "*bio-capacity*". The per capita figures for some countries are:

(gha/person)	<i>Bio-Capacity</i>	<i>Ecological Footprint</i>	<i>Over-exploitation</i>
World	1.8	2.2	22%
USA	4.7	9.6	104%
Pakistan	0.3	0.6	100%
UAE	0.8	11.9	1,387%

The worst offender is the UAE. However, in order to assist them in over-exploiting Pakistan's natural resources, many local agencies have invited Dubai developers to teach us how to destroy our environment.