

Update & Report from the Working Committee selected by the Residents' Assembly From August to October 2022

Dear friends,

We would like to update you on topics which we have been dealing with for the past three months, from August to October 2022. We apologize in advance for this lengthy report but there is much that we felt needed to be shared with you, to add to what has already been covered in previous massbulletins and community meetings. Moving forward, we will do our best to publish our reports on a monthly basis. For this time we suggest you make yourself comfortable with snacks. ;-)

Please feel free to visit us or email us if you have any questions. Our Open House hours are from 10 to 12 on Tuesdays, in the former Koodam Office opposite the Auroville Library, and our email address is workingcom@auroville.services.

Legal matters

History

As many of you know, the Working Committee has felt obliged to approach the Courts following the refusal of the Secretary to recognize the Residents' Assembly Decision announced on 9th May 2022. In this decision, the Residents' Assembly (RA) had dismissed four members of the Working Committee while confirming the three other ones with an overwhelming majority of votes.

The Secretary and the dismissed four members decided to ignore these results, on the basis of a letter issued by the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) of the Auroville Foundation. This letter aimed at invalidating and stopping all decision-making of the Residents' Assembly (including all sorts of information-sharing meetings), based on the claims that the Register of Residents (maintained by the Office of the Secretary) had allegedly not been updated since 2005. However, these claims have proven to be false, since we have written acknowledgment by the Office of the Secretary of updates in the RoR dated April 2021, shortly before Dr Jayanti Ravi's tenure. Furthermore, the OSD's letter was considered groundless, since the Office of the Secretary has no role to play in the functioning of the Residents' Assembly and its decision-making processes, nor in the selection and term of office of Working Committee members, as per the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988.

Following the OSD's letter, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and the dismissed members tried taking possession of the Working Committee office with the support of the police. Since they did not succeed, the Office of the Secretary filed a criminal complaint and an FIR against the three ongoing members of the Working Committee and three other Aurovilians. At this point, Working Committee members were forced to take legal action in the criminal courts to protect those that had been wrongly accused, especially considering that the lawyers hired by the Office of the Secretary insisted in the courts that the said

Aurovilians should be arrested. Thankfully, anticipatory bail was granted by the courts, avoiding the arrest of the six Aurovilians. We wonder how the Office of the Secretary could go to such extremes for a difference of opinion, and how other Aurovilians including the dismissed members of the Working Committee and their nominees could come to cross such a line. Further Court action also needed to be taken, with the purpose to establish the legitimacy of the Residents' Assembly and its decisions, particularly in the case of constituting the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly.

Court hearings and judgment

The civil case regarding the functioning of the Residents' Assembly and the constitution of its Working Committee was discussed in several hearings in June and July. A judgment was issued by the Honorable Madras High Court on 12th August 2022, recognising and affirming the role of the Residents' Assembly as an authority of the Auroville Foundation. The judgment quashed the OSD's letter denying the validity of the RAD on the Working Committee membership, and thus confirming that the undersigned members are the valid and legitimate Working Committee of the RA. This was followed-up in [an email](#) to the GB and IAC. The judgment also confirmed that the role of the Governing Board and of the Residents' Assembly is that of mutuality and cooperation.

However, the Secretary has appealed this decision, claiming that the Governing Board is the final authority for taking decisions in Auroville (thus bypassing the central role of the Residents' Assembly). An interim stay has been granted until the appeal has been heard and a new ruling comes from the Courts. The appeal might be discussed in the next few weeks and we are awaiting its results with confidence.

Other court cases

Since the initial filing of the Working Committee petition to the courts, several Office Orders were issued by the Office of the Secretary to dismiss and replace members for essential working groups and committees of the Residents' Assembly, such as the FAMC, the BCC and the Housing group, without following due process. The Working Committee has been obliged to take again this issue of denying the RA's role to the civil courts. The matter has not yet been discussed in the Court and we will report as soon as there are some developments.

The RA Working Committee is in regular contact with lawyers and we are following-up on legal matters with the help of resource persons.

Meetings with officials and others

Meetings with state and local officials

The RA Working Committee has had various meetings with state and local officials to address several issues. We are grateful for the efforts of our liaison officer and other resource persons for actively helping us to maintain and establish useful contacts with officials at all levels.

Meeting with the Chairman of the GB

The RA Working Committee had a two-hour meeting with the Chairman of the Governing Board, Sri RN Ravi, during his visit to Auroville on Wednesday 19th October. A brief report of this meeting was sent via [massbulletin](#), together with the [note](#) that was handed over to him. A follow-up letter was sent to the Chairman on 22nd October, and can be read [here](#).

Upcoming meeting of the GB

We have been informed that the upcoming meeting of the Governing Board will take place on 8th November. We have sent the Chairman and the Governing Board a request that the RA Working Committee, as well as other RA-selected Working Groups, be given a slot to interact with them. We have also requested for a meeting to take place with the community. Additionally, we have [written](#) to the Secretary requesting that the minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Board (the 60th) are shared widely and as soon as possible before the meeting on the 8th. We are yet to receive a reply to any of these requests.

Meeting with IAC members

Dena Merriam, chairperson to the International Advisory Council, visited Auroville for the first time in her tenure, on the 1st of October. We received her upon her arrival and had a friendly dinner and frank conversation. Meetings were arranged on the afternoon of the 3rd October between Dena Merriam and the RA FAMC, the RA TDC and the Auroville Council. We also met with Michel Danino, IAC member, who was visiting Auroville in the same period.

‘Deep Dialogue’ with Mr Raghu

On 8th September, we and other RA working groups sent a [massbulletin](#) about the ‘deep dialogue’ proposed by Mr Raghu Ananthanaryanan as part of an initiative by Dena Merriam. Letters were also sent [to Dena Merriam](#), [to the Secretary](#) and [to Mr Raghu](#) - to which he [replied](#). During his visit to Auroville on the 1st through 4th of October, we had a meeting with Mr Raghu and some members of our group also had individual meetings with him.

Visas

The situation with visas in Auroville remains highly disturbing. Since December 2021, more than 70 residents have obtained recommendation letters for a shorter duration than what they were eligible for. There are currently about 70 letters of recommendations pending on the Secretary’s desk, which await her signature, and some of these are pending since early 2022. This has resulted in the visas of a number of residents expiring without renewal, which means they are in India without a valid visa, and several being charged high penalty fees, through no fault of their own.

On 26th October we came to know that one long-term Aurovilian received a recommendation letter for only 3 months, with no explanation given and in spite of the visa policy for Auroville as approved by the Ministry for Home Affairs only allowing for a minimum of one year for Auroville residents. In the past 10 days, a few more residents have received letters of recommendation for only one year when they are eligible for 5 years.

We are following up on the matter and are doing our best to address this situation. We have also again requested the Chairman to look into the matter.

Land-related matters

Over the past few months, we have been involved in various actions to protect Auroville land. These actions have included visiting various officials, writing multiple letters to authorities and following-up legal steps with lawyers.

Abri / Ami / Evergreen encroachment

Many massbulletins have gone out in the past weeks to inform residents about the encroachment at the Abri / Ami / Evergreen corner, and the unfolding of events. These recent massbulletins are:

- [05.09.2022, On Land Encroachment](#)
- [10.09.2022, WCom update on Abri/Ami encroachment](#)
- [23.09.2022, Update on land-related matters from the Working Committee](#)
- [23.09.2022, Urgent announcement about Evergreen](#)
- [24.09.2022, Call to file online police complaints](#)
- [25.09.2022, Update regarding Evergreen corner](#)
- [11.10.2022, Clarifications re Ami/Abri/Evergreen land issue and 'shadow groups'](#)

Since our last massbulletin on this matter, members and resource persons of the RA Working Committee have gone to the courts twice, on the 14th and 20th of October. A judgment on the Abri / Ami / Evergreen lands is expected at the beginning of November. More information will be shared as and when it is available.

Other related communications:

- [06.09.2022, Letter to the Chairman requesting for the protection of land and the safety of residents](#)
- [08.09.2022, Letter to the Secretary about the threat to Auroville lands and residents](#)
- [08.09.2022, Letter to the Chairman about the escalation of land grab actions and threats to residents](#)
- [13.09.2022, Letter to the Secretary about the land grabbing at Abri corner](#)
- [13.09.2022, Letter to the Chairman about a negligence and dereliction of duty by the Estate Officer of Auroville Foundation](#)
- [15.09.2022, Letter to the Chairman on the Evergreen land situation](#)
- [25.09.2022, Letter to the Secretary with an update on land grab](#)
- [08.10.2022, Letter to the Chairman regarding land encroachments](#)

Land exchange

It has come to our notice that at least two land exchanges have been registered and others are in the process of being registered, which may severely affect Auroville and its residents. The RA Working Committee and the RA FAMC are not being consulted in such deals, which are done without following the due diligence procedure, with no transparency and often at rates which amount to heavy financial losses for Auroville. In some cases, the lands that are being negotiated with outside investors have been bought by the Mother herself, and have received her blessings. From the end of August onwards, we have addressed [the Chairman](#),

[the Land Board](#) and various authorities, objecting to land exchanges being done without due process and without involving the community through its representatives. However, there hasn't been acknowledgement nor any change of direction by the Office of the Secretary and the Land Board. We are following-up on the matter at several levels.

Resource persons

It is mainly thanks to important resource persons and our liaison officer that we have been able to follow-up on all land-related matters so far. We would like to extend our thanks to them and hope that we can continue to collaborate to safeguard the body of Auroville.

Conference at UNESCO Paris

The event that was planned at UNESCO Paris on 30th September, at the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary, has been deferred until further notice by India's Ministry of Culture. The RA Working Committee had expressed its concerns in regards to the part of the program related to Auroville, including the focus of the program and how the speakers to this event were selected, as reported in [a previous massbulletin](#). These concerns were shared by many community members and well-wishers of Auroville around the world, including [the Auroville International Board](#). A member of the IAC raised concerns about the letter sent by the AVI Board, to which [we replied](#).

The RA Working Committee sent [a follow-up letter](#) to the Ministry of Culture expressing its relief and suggesting that Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary needs to be celebrated in the most honorable way with a wide view and synthesis of several approaches, and the participation of Sri Aurobindo centers from across India and the world.

Emergency RAD and Resolution

As most of you are aware, following the 12th August Madras High Court judgment, the RA Working Committee had organized an Emergency Residents' Assembly Decision (RAD) to seek approval on a Resolution supporting the judgment and confirming the members of various working groups and services selected by the RA. A record of [1161 residents participated in the decision](#), out of which 97% approved [the resolution](#). We take this occasion to thank again the Residents' Assembly Service and the many volunteers who helped us with this process.

In spite of the RAD outcome, a member of the Governing Board questioned our legitimacy as the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly. You can find [here](#) our reply to him.

Other related communications:

- [19.08.2022, Joint statement with other working groups on the legal situation and the emergency RAD](#)
- [20.08.2022, Clarification and legal opinion on holding meetings \(see the legal opinion here\)](#)
- [25.08.2022, Email to the GB & IAC announcing the Residents' Assembly Resolution No. RAD/04/2022 \(this was also sent to the AVI centers\)](#)

Register of Residents

Entering of new Aurovilians into the RoR

It has come to our notice that Aurovilians who have been confirmed by the Entry Board in the past one year, and have signed the B-Form, are still waiting to be entered into the Register of Residents maintained by the Office of the Secretary. We have requested the Entry Service to send us a list of such cases so that we can better address the situation.

RoR update and home visits

Following the 12th August judgment of the Madras High Court, the RA Working Committee has requested all residents to fill-up the RoR updation form - please see the massbulletins sent on [18th August](#) and [26th August](#). A month later, the Office of the Secretary and the illegitimate 'Working Committee' announced home visits for the purpose of updating the RoR and conducting a house survey. In a [massbulletin](#) on 30th September, we clarified that there is no link between the updating of the RoR and the survey of assets for determination of House Tax. Since then, several Aurovilians have shared with us how the home visits related to the RoR update went. In many cases, the home visits were reported to be friendly; however, in specific cases people were met with cameras and an attitude that was felt to be disrespectful, aimed to harass specific residents, and/or intended to create PR material. It was noted that most of the visits were made without prior intimation to the stewards of the homes that were being visited. We remind all residents that the Residents' Service needs to be informed of changes in your administrative situation and/or contact information.

Media and Communication

The Media and Communication cell that was created and [announced](#) to the community in July 2022 has been functioning well and actively sharing contents. The aim of the cell is to fulfill communication needs, both internal and external, and to work on multiple media and direct communication channels to gather, integrate and disseminate the views of different residents and the bonafide working groups of the Residents' Assembly. You can visit www.auroville.media for more information, and follow @AurovilleNews on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for regular updates. A media toolkit is also available [at this link](#).

Help is needed with this work, especially for content writing, social media and video production, including video editing. If there are any of these or other communication skills that you would like to offer, please contact us: workingcom@auroville.services

On emails and communication platforms

In the past months, additional working groups and services have lost access to their inboxes and Drives, such as the Housing Board, the Budget Coordination Committee, the Entry Board and Service, and the Residents' Assembly Service. [Alternative email addresses](#) have been created for each of these groups and services, and we continue to look into the most appropriate manner to address the issue of the email takeover. We have addressed this topic during our meeting with the Chairman Sri RN Ravi, and have written [a separate email](#) to him in this regard.

Several residents have also continued to report being blocked from AuroNet, and having their AuroNet posts deleted without notice. If this is your case, please email the Auroville Council at avcouncil@auroville.services.

We take this opportunity to remind Aurovilians that a new massbulletin emailing service has been created to replace the former tool which had been taken over. If you do not yet receive the new Auroville massbulletin, you can send an email to avmassbulletin@auroville.services or click on [this link](#) to join the massbulletin Telegram channel (you need to have a Telegram account before doing so - [click here for a tutorial on how to install Telegram](#)).

Housing issues

Eviction of an Aurovilian family in Center Field

Over the past months, a family of long-time Aurovilians living in Center Field has been repeatedly harassed and served with a show-cause notice for eviction by the Office of the Secretary, without any proper and suitable alternatives offered. This has been done in spite of earlier arrangements and promises by the 'ATDC' working for the Office of the Secretary. We had already written [to the Chairman](#) on this matter towards the end of August. However, the situation has continued to escalate further with the issuing of a show-cause notice on baseless grounds, as expressed [here](#). The RA Working Committee, together with the RA FAMC and the RA TDC, have recently written a [massbulletin](#) on this matter. We have also written [to the Chairman](#) on this topic (see attachment [here](#)), and are doing our best to help the concerned residents.

Eviction orders issued by the new 'Housing Service'

As you may be aware, the existing Housing group (Service and Board) has recently been replaced by a Housing Service appointed by an order from the Office of the Secretary. Subsequently, a number of residents have recently been ordered to vacate various housing assets in spite of having legitimate agreements with the RA Housing Board. The most recent harassments related to housing affect a resident with an invalid father, and a few others. Since most of these eviction orders have been issued in the past week, it seems this might be a new tactic of the Office of the Secretary and their appointees to intimidate residents and increase the sense of insecurity and instability that we all feel. We are following-up on the matter with the FAMC and doing our best to address the situation.

Safety & Security

Dismantled portions of the Crown road

Over the last months, the dismantled portions of the Crown road have raised serious safety and security issues. Several accidents have been reported due to the absence of proper marking and the unsafe nature of the existing bypasses. These incidents have increased since the start of the monsoon, with the slippery and muddy pathways that have replaced the earlier fully-functional paved roads. As mentioned in a [massbulletin](#) on 24th August, we wrote [an email](#) to the Secretary informing about the situation and our concerns about safety issues. On 28th October, the RA TDC and RA Working Committee sent a [letter](#) to the CPWD and various others in this regard.

Miscellaneous

We have been dealing with various cases related to the safety and security of Auroville residents and volunteers, jointly with the appropriate groups and services. As and when required, coordination with the police is also being done thanks to our liaison officer and to some of our members. We have also been informed that new CCTV cameras have been installed in Auroville by the Office of the Secretary. We have not been consulted in the installation of these CCTV cameras.

Administrative documents and certificates

At present the RA Working Committee cannot recommend visa extensions and new visa applications to the Office of the Secretary, which refuses to interact with us and recognise our legitimacy. However, we are still able to deliver certificates and documents for other administrative purposes. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are in need of such certificates by writing to workingcom@auroville.services

Interactions with other working groups

Weekly joint meetings

The RA Working Committee and other RA-selected working groups (Auroville Council, RA FAMC and RA TDC) are meeting every week to update each other and discuss various topics of common interest, in order to address issues in a more effective and integral way. In addition to these weekly joint meetings, we also have specific topic-based meetings with these and other working groups as and when needed.

Survey on restorative processes

One of the topics that came out of our weekly joint meetings with the Auroville Council, FAMC and TDC is the need to address the possibility of restorative processes between the RA, the GB and the IAC, particularly following the Madras High Court judgment of 12th August. In this regard, a short survey for residents to fill out has recently been launched. You can find the announcement [here](#) and the survey [here](#). The aim of this survey is not to make any decision but simply to get a sense of how people feel about some kind of reconciliation process being explored at some point.

Community interaction

Community meetings

The RA Working Committee, together with the Auroville Council, RA FAMC and RA TDC have organized three meetings with the community in the last three months to provide updates, answer questions, harvest suggestions and create space for dialogue. These gatherings have been exploring different meeting formats, and we would appreciate your feedback on how you experienced these as well as your suggestions on improving the format of meetings.

Open house timings

All four working groups as well as the BCC have set up a weekly 'open house' during which you can meet their members. These weekly timings are:

- TDC: Mondays 1-2pm, Koodam office (opposite the Library)
- Working Committee: Tuesdays 10am-12, Koodam office (opposite the Library)
- BCC: Tuesdays 10.30am-12 & 2.30-3.30pm, AV Council meeting room (Town Hall)
- FAMC: Wednesdays 2.30-4.30pm, Koodam office (opposite the Library)
- Auroville Council: Thursdays 11am-12, AV Council meeting room (Town Hall)

Other letters and written communications

We have written a number of letters and communications that are not included above, but that we would like to share with you for the sake of transparency. We do not include here the communications that were previously mentioned in this report, nor some of the letters sent to various officials - which need to remain confidential in order to serve their purpose.

- [08.08.2022, Email to the AVI centers on the current situation in Auroville](#)
- [09.08.2022, Letter to the GB and IAC regarding the GB and IAC meeting of 12th August and their visit to Auroville](#)
- [14.08.2022, Massbulletin: Invitation to go inwards](#)
- [15.08.2022, Email to Entry Board on the Act and Regulations](#)
- [16.08.2022, Massbulletin: Communication on the Town Hall being locked](#)
- [27.08.2022, Massbulletin: Concerning inappropriate quotes on Auronet \(with AV Council\)](#)
- [01.09.2022, Massbulletin: On the takeover of Housing and BCC](#)
- [02.09.2022, Massbulletin: Public Notice: Illegitimate Appointees \(errata\)](#)
- [22.10.2022, Massbulletin: Reminder about driver's licences](#)

In conclusion, the situation in Auroville is complex, unsettling, and calls for our utmost care and attention at remaining balanced and centered in all circumstances. It is through our collective efforts and goodwill that Auroville will navigate the storm that is passing over us all.

We continue to dedicate ourselves fully to fulfill the mandate given to us by the Residents' Assembly, for the co-creation and manifestation of Mother's Dream.

In community,

Your Working Committee

Aravinda, Bharathy, Chali, Hemant, Maël, Sauro, Valli