

# **National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers**

**January 8-10, 2010, Patna**

## **A Brief Report**

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The three-day National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers concluded with a declaration that called for the launch of a national movement for universal and non-discriminatory social security for all people living and working in India with emphasis on social security for those who have been denied. The convention held from January 8-10, 2010 at the Bihar Chamber of Commerce, Patna, Bihar.

The national convention was attended by over 500 delegates including a large number of women delegates. The rally and public meeting on the day three mobilised over 2000 unorganised workers from in and around Patna. Women were mobilised in a large numbers for the rally. Participants were largely unorganised workers from Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. They included domestic workers, immigrants from Nepal, construction workers, beedi workers, agarbatti workers, mining workers, stone quarry workers, brick kiln workers, sex workers, transport workers, head load workers, hamal workers, weavers, agricultural workers, garment workers, hawkers, street vendors, rickshawpullers, washers, waste collectors, leather workers, bank deposit collectors, basket makers, minor forest produce collectors, forest workers, workers engaged in agriculture related and allied activities, cleaners and trolley workers. Central Trade Unions who were present during the three day convention included All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), Trade Union Coordination Committee (TUCC) and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

The convention was organised by Social Security Now (SSN), a network of over 500 workers organisations, people's movements, organisations campaigning for social security, organisations of dalit, adivasis and other socially disadvantaged groups. Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) is the National Secretariat for the SSN. The National Working group of the SSN steered the National Convention. Nidan was the local host and the event secretariat. The entire three day event was discussed and planned by the SSN NWG over a period of over 6 months in various planning meetings and email discussions. On the three days of the National Convention, each of the sessions had a presidium in the chair which constituted of the SSN NWG members.

On January 8, 2010 the inaugural session was addressed by Digvijay Singh, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Ali Anwar Ansari, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Kamala Sinha, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Awadhesh Narayan Singh, Cabinet Minister, Labour Employment and

Training, Bihar Government, Kedarnath Pandey, Member of Bihar Legislative Council, Jaya Shrivastava, Social Activist, Ashok Ghosh, United Trades Unions Congress (UTUC), Amjad Hasan, Indian national Trade Union Congress (INTUC), K Vinay Kumar, National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements (NFDLRM), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Shanti Patel, Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Freedom fighter, and former Member of Parliament and Justice R R Prasad, Bihar Human Rights Commission (BHRC) and J John, CEC. This session set the tone of the two-day convention by making a political statement in favour of social security. Labour minister pointed the need to distribute wealth of the nation among the workers through social security. Ali Anwar said that he himself was a beedi worker and hence understands the needs and aspirations for social security. Digvijay Singh pointed on the importance of movements and struggles of workers which have stood the test of time and the need for this campaign to be strong and raise the demand for social security. Shanti Patel stressed on the importance of social security as a basic right of the workers and the importance of organisations of workers to collectively demand this. Vinay Kumar pointed on how India's expenditure on social security is less than 1 per cent of the GDP which is less than Bangladesh and Sri Lanka implying that for Indian State social security remains neglected. Jaya Shrivastava pointed on how the unprotected work and an informal workforce was increasing in all sectors of the economy and the need to build on social security. J John explained that social security is a right enshrined in the constitution of India as well as several international instruments but is denied to the vast majority as it remains targeted. He pointed at how a dual system of social security has been followed in the national planning process and the need to reject this and demand social security which is universal. Harish Rawat, Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Government of India, Umraomal Purohit, General Secretary, HMS Sudhakar Reddy, former MP and chairman, Standing Committee on Labour and ILO sent solidarity messages for the National Convention.

The second session on Day 1 was Mazdooron Ki Awaz. Jury Panel in Mazdooron ki Awaz comprised of Sujata Gothoskar, IUF, SN Thakur, All India trade Union Congress (AITUC) and Arun Kumar, Times of India (TOI). Depositions were from the following sectors - domestic, homebased, waste collector, handloom weaver, street vendor, goods transporter, sex worker, bank deposit collector, agricultural worker, leather worker, migrant worker, rickshaw puller, brick kiln and mining. In addition to the depositions there were questions and clarifications from the jury as well and inputs from the participants and the initial report of the jury took all these into account. The depositions brought some basic social protections that workers need and why they need the same. Issue of health and health provisions is crucial – unorganised workers spend a disproportionate part of their incomes on health / medical reasons. Above all, unorganised workers are not able to eat unless they work. Workers also spoke of the need for social security in terms of pension, gratuity, provident fund for the very reason. Right to dignity and freedom from discrimination in any form is crucial. The session brought out that the divide between so-called BPL and APL workers is not valid. All workers must have social security. These include the provisions of the Maternity Benefits Act, including the right to light work after 6.5 months of pregnancy, right to health care, right to occupational and safety provisions and compensation. Unemployment allowance and compensation for not being able to work in case of eg accidents is important. Livelihood rights are important.

Where livelihood systems undergo a change due to government policy or due to developments in society or the economy, the workers affected need to be given livelihood security, compensation as well as training for newer work. Women doing unpaid work as well as family labour need to be considered unorganised workers and should be entitled to the provisions of the SSA.

The third session was held on Day two and was a Panel discussion on Social Security and Vulnerabilities of Dalits, Adivasis, Women, Migrants and Urban Poor. Speakers in this session included Sandhya, USDMWM, Radhakant Dwivedi, National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), Sujata Gothoskar, (IUF), Jai Singh, Dalit Dasta Virodhi Andolan (DDVA), Dalip Singh Pandhi, Punjab State Commission for Scheduled Castes, Raju Bhise, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) and Shaktiman Ghosh, Hawkers Sangram Samiti (HSS). Followed by the panellists speakers there were various interventions from the floor and participants from various states and sectors placed their concerns on the issue. The speakers talked about vulnerabilities of dalits, adivasis, women, migrants and urban poor and the need for the law on social security to address them. Speakers pointed how state is taking away basic rights workers including the right to life. The 2008 Act does not guarantee social security to the dalits, adivasis and women, there should be non-discrimination against women and unpaid women's work needs to be recognised. Displacement and land rights were another important issue raised by the participants. Issues of migrant workers including immigrants from Nepal were raised.

The fourth session was on Financing Social Security. Speakers in this session included Praveen Jha, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and D Narasimha Reddy, former dean, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad. The session focused on options for financing social security fund through allocation in budget, ten per cent reduction in defence budget and through tax revenues from investors, corporate and rich should promote development and enable the government to have space for funding social security. Pravin Jha pointed on the weakness of the present Act, particularly in comparison with the NCEUS recommendations. He noted that in 2008 there was a provision of almost 1387 crore but this was subsequently reduced. D Narasimha Reddy pointed that 6 per cent of the GDP is sufficient to finance social security. But when 1.5 lakh crore tax arrear is due from 100 people, corporate is taxed less than 20 per cent, exemption is granted to the extent of 59 000 crores in 2008 and custom duty exemption of 2.78 lakh crores and FDI is totally untaxed then we are at a loss of over 60 per cent of our revenue which itself is enough to finance social security.

In the post lunch session on day two there were group discussions to prepare national and regional strategy and action plan. Issues of group discussions were: Universalisation, Inclusiveness, Organisation, Financing and UWSSA 2008. Followed by group discussions there was a plenary where the key points were placed. This session finalised the Patna Declaration given as attachment. This was followed by the conclusion of the programme and the concluding speakers were Shanti Patel, Jaya Shrivastava, Ambrish Rai, Ranjan Kumar and J John.

All the sessions had a presidium in chair which comprised of the SSN NWG members. The SSN NWG members are as follows: Bindrai Institute for Research Study and Action (BIRSA), CBCI Commission for Labour, Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON), Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), Cornerstone Trust, Delhi Forum, Delhi Shramik Sangathan (DSS), Foundation of Educational Innovations in Asia (FEDINA), Harit Recyclers Association (HRA), Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), Indian Social Institute (ISI), Jan Sangarsh Manch, Laya, Lok Sangharsh Morcha, National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Sector Workers (NCC-USW), National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements (NFDLRM), National Forum on Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), National Hawkers Federation (NHF), National Institute of Women Child and Youth Development (NIWCYD), nidan, Nirmala Niketan, Pragatishila Shramik Manch (PSM), Programme on Women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), Uttar Pradesh Gramin Mazdoor Sangathan (UPGMS), Vigyan Foundation, Women's Voice, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA).

On the third and final day there was a rally followed by a public meeting. Over 2000 workers were present for the rally. Speakers in the public meeting included Yuvraj Baskota, MINA; Ambrish Rai, LSM; Vinay Kumar, NCDHR; Raju Bhise, Asangathit Shramik Panchayat; Amjad Hassan, INTUC; Syam Sundar, PSM; Badri Jat, CECOEDECON; Chandra Mohan, Cornerstone; Arun Khote, USDMWM; Ram Jatan Sahu, BIRSA; Shanti Patel, HMS; Ashok Ghosh, UTUC; Subhash Bhatnagar, NCCUSW; Ranjan, nidan and J John, CEC. Rally emphasised the need for universal and non discriminatory Social security to be extended to all people living and working in India, the need for social security to address inclusion of dalits, non displacement of adivasis and housing rights of dalits adivasis, recognition of unpaid work of women and land rights of women and vulnerabilities of migrants and called for the launch national movement for the same. It was stressed that the State should allocate 10 per cent of the budget and provide 5 per cent of the GDP for universal non discriminatory social security as all people living and working in India have the right over wealth collectively produced in India. It was also announced that February 23 will be observed as a national action day for social security. Followed by this, during the budget session a symbolic event in Delhi will be organised a day prior to the budget presentation.

## **Major Achievements**

- Call for a universal non-discriminatory social security for all people living and working in India as opposed to the prevalent social security system emerged from the national convention
- Articulations of dalits, adivasis, women and migrants' perspectives on social security, for instance, "social security is a dalit right"
- Increased cooperation between organisations of workers, people's movements, organisations campaigning for social security, organisations of dalit, adivasis, women and migrants and other socially disadvantaged groups
- Critically addressed the UWSSA 2008 and suggested amendments

- Adopted Patna Declaration which gives a direction to the campaign
- A decentralised campaign strategy and plan of action with emphasis on involvement of the masses

### **Constraints**

- Political mileage could have been better if more Ministers and MPs from the ruling coalition at the centre attended the convention
- Financial resources remained a constraint
- Efforts could have been made to ensure participation from more states and sectors
- Many of the participants could have articulated social security better than they did
- There was a general feeling that the national convention could have been for a day more so that more people could intervene and participate in the debates and discussions
- Campaign and educational materials could have reached the participants much earlier
- Due to unavoidable logistical constraints the cultural presentations by various groups could not be staged

### **Media Response**

Around 10 news papers and 8 electronic media continuously covered the three days programme and the press conference of the National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers, January 8-10, 2010, Patna, Bihar.

The press conference organised as a curtain raiser to three day national convention was covered by the following newspapers on January 8, 2010: Prabhat Kabhar, January 08, 2010, “Asangathit Mazdooron ko mile samajik sureksha”; Hindustan, January 08, 2010, “Asangathit Mazdooron ki samajik suraksha par adiveshan aaj se”; Dainik Jagaran, January 08, 2010, “Mazdooron ki samajik suraksha par adiveshan aaj”;

On January 9, 2010 newspaper reports were: Dainik Jagaran, January 09, 2010, Bin siksha garibon mein yojana ka labh nahi: Mantri”; Aaj, January, 09, 2010, Samajik suraksha ke aabhav mein garib asurakshit: Manti”; Hindustan, January 09, 2010, Labharthiyon ko nahi mil raha labh”; Hindustan Times, January 09, 2010, “Fill structural gaps in unorganised workers Act 2008”; i Next, January 09, 2010, “Sab ka vikas aavashyak”; Times of India, January 09, 2010, “Number of poor up in Bihar”; Pratyush Navbihar, January 09, 2010, Samajik suraksha ka labh nahi mil raha garibon ko: Mantri”; Rastriya Sahara, January 09, 2010, “Vaishvik Manti ka khamiyaja bhugat rahe mazdoor”; Prabhat Kabhar, January, 09, 2010, “Kanoon to bana, par sampoon suraksha nahi mili”; Prabhat Kabhar, January 09, 2010, “Asangathit Kshetr mein ekjutna jaroori: Digvijay”;

The newspapers the covered the event on January 10, 2010 were: Prabhat Kabhar, January 10, 2010, Asangathit Mazdooron ko bhi mile samajik sureksha”; Hindustan, January 10, 2010, “Shramikon ki suraksha ke liye bane kanoon”; Pratyush Navbihar, January 10, 2010, “Dalit mahila arse se pratadith:

Sujata”; Hindustan Times, January 10, 2009, “Amend unorganised workers social security act”; Rastriya Sahara, January 10, 2010, “Shramikon ki asuraksha door karne ke liye bene kanoon”;

The rally and public meeting held on January 11, 2010 were covered by the following newspapers: Rastriya Sahara, January 11, 2010, “Kanoon mein sanshodhan ko lekar nikaley rally”; Pratyush Navbihar, January 11, 2010, “Samagr samajik suraksha kanoon banane ki mang”; Sanmarg, January 11, 2010, “Samagr samajik suraksha kanoon banane ki mang”; Dainik Jagaran, January 11, 2010, “Mazdooron ne nikaley rally”; Prabhat Kabhar, January 11, 2010, “Mazdooron ko samajik suraksha deni hogi”; Hindustan, January 11, 2010, “Asangathit Mazdooron ne nikaley rally”.

The electronic media that covered the three day event included: Darsh News; PTN News; Hamar TV; Mahuaa News; Maurya News; Doordarshan; Sahara Samay and Bihar News

### **Sharing of Financial Responsibilities**

By and large all the participating organisations (about 200) contributed to the meeting by bearing their delegates travel expenses. CBCI contributed by offering accommodation for guests. Ndan contributed towards the venue cost and coordination. FEDINA contributed 2.14 lakh. CEC has contributed about 8.62 lakh with the support of Christian Aid and Dan Church Aid. Nevertheless, there remains a deficit of about Rs. 3.7 lakh with CEC, the national secretariat of SSN.

### **Follow up of the National Convention**

- February 23 will be observed as a national action day for social security and district secretariats will be targeted.
- Followed by this, during the budget session in February 2010 a symbolic event in Delhi will be organised a day prior to the budget presentation