

Press Release

A National Convention of about 500-700 NGO/Trade Union/Peoples' Movement representatives on issues of Social Security for unorganised workers will begin on October 26, 2006 at Ramgopal Maheshwari Sanskrutik Sabhagriha, More Bhavan, Sitabuldi, Nagpur.

Shri Anil Deshmukh, Honourable Minister of Public Works, Government of Maharashtra will be the chief guest at the inaugural session beginning 10.30am. Marc Souquet, Expert on social security, International Labour Organisation, Dr. K P Kannan, Member, National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, Honourable Mayor, Naresh Gavande, the city of Nagpur, J John, Executive Director, Centre for Education & Communication are other dignitaries who would be present during the inaugural session, which will be presided over by Dr. Kumar Saptarshi, founder of Yuvak Kranti Dal. In a unique way, unorganised adivasi workers from Jharkhand by lighting '*mashals*' will inaugurate the Convention. The programme will conclude on October 28, 2006.

Medha Patkar, National Alliance of People's Movements; Dr. Shanti Patel, former mayor of Mumbai and senior trade union leader; H. Mahadevan, Deputy General Secretary, AITUC; R A Mittal, National Secretary, HMS; D.Thankappan, NTUI; Subhash Lomte, Samajwadi Jan Prishad; R K A Subrahmania, Social Security Association of India; Dr. Venkata Ratnam, Director, International Management Institute; Subhash Bhatnagar, National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Workers; Dr. Rupatai Kulkarni; Ranana Jhabwala, Self-employed Women's Association are among other dignitaries addressing the gathering.

The Convention has been called in the context of increasing vulnerability and exploitation of unorganised workers as a consequence of globalisation as well as the heightened interest in the government circles after the proposal of the National Commission for Unorganised Enterprises in 2006 for a bill for the social security for unorganised workers.

Earlier, an Umbrella Legislation for Unorganised Sector Workers was submitted by the Second National Commission on Labour in 2002 recommending for a comprehensive social security cover with regulation of employment and dispute resolution system. The government, however, introduced a scheme for social security of unorganised workers in early 2004, which failed to take off. Subsequently Labour Ministry floated one more draft bill (2004). There are two other bills, namely Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Bill, 2005 by National Advisory Council of UPA and Unorganised Sector Workers Bill, 2005 by National Centre for Labour. The NCC-USW also suggested a draft bill. Besides, Central Trade Unions also submitted their joint comments on the draft bill of the government.

A legislation for Social Security for about 390 million unorganised workers is under the consideration of the UPA government. Recently, the Prime Minister has referred the Bill to a Committee of Secretaries for finalisation.

Realising that only a critical mass movement would force the government to introduce the bill in the parliament, a meeting of trade unions and other organizations on the issue of comprehensive legislation for unorganized workers, held in CITU office on October 19, 2006, had given a unanimous call to launch a nationwide campaign to pressurise government to introduce bills in the next session of the Parliament. The Nagpur Convention is expected to ratify this call and launch a national campaign.

The Convention has been called by a consortium of 14 NGO networks comprising of BIRSA, Ranchi; NAFRE, Delhi; CEC, Delhi; NCC-USW, Delhi; Delhi Forum, Delhi; NCDHR, Delhi; FEDINA, Bangalore; NIWCYD, Nagpur; HRLN, Delhi; PWESCR, Delhi; ISI, Delhi; Women's Voice, Bangalore; LAYA, Vishakhapatnam and YUVA, Mumbai.

The Convention is intended to critically look at various Bills on Unorganised Sector workers, to assert state responsibility to provide Social Security in Unorganised Sector and to strengthen NGOs role as facilitators and campaigners addressing issues of unorganised sector. The Convention is also intended to facilitate a meaningful alliance and coordination of

Trade Unions and People movements of dalits, women's groups, forest peoples, agriculture workers etc. with NGOs to build a base of unorganised workers.

The Convention will deliberate on issues like 'Social Security versus Employment regulation', 'Discrimination in Social Security Benefits', 'Social Exclusion, Discrimination and Violence based on Caste', 'Women and Social Security', 'Sexual Harassment, Violence and Gender Discrimination in Unorganised Sector', 'Structure of Social Security administration', 'Social Security fund - sources and method of collection' 'Need for a separate Comprehensive Law for Agriculture Workers', 'Feasibility of Insurance Based Social Security and Privatization of Insurance, alternative ways as in ESI Scheme' and 'New Economic Reforms and Unorganised Sector'.

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Nagpur
October 25, 2006