

Press Release

The National Convention of more than 700 social activists from all over India on Social Security for Unorganised Workers in its second day was addressed by eminent Trade Union Leaders, leaders of people's movement and academics.

Expressing support to the national convention on social security, Mr. H. Mahadevan, Deputy General Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) recalled that a meeting of trade unions and NGOs held in New Delhi on October 19 this year decided that a comprehensive legislation for Unorganised Workers covering service condition, employment regulation, minimum wage and dispute settlement mechanism is needed. He called the participants of the convention to be part of this national campaign. Implementation of this legislation was also emphasised. He pointed at the problems in organizing unorganized workers; over 60 per cent of them are on contract or are casuals, units in which they work are often registered as small scale industries and there is a total lack of support from the authorities such as police and labour department towards organising. Mr. R.A. Mital, National Secretary, Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) noted that NGOs and Trade Unions have never been opposed to each other – infact they compliment each other. Blaming the government for adopting strategies to keep the organized and unorganized workers divided, he stressed on the need to introduce the bill in the parliament immediately in order to make it a reality. This will further open opportunities for debates and changes in the bill.

Mr. Ashok Ghosh, National Secretary, United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) stressed that social security is a human right and an issue of social justice. He noted that trade unions have not prioritized organizing the informal sector, for which concerted efforts are needed at this stage. He also stressed that without minimum wage social security cannot be implemented. D. Thankapan, Secretary, New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) said that trade unions have a historical responsibility at this stage - to bring about a legislation for ensuring social security. He pointed that according to an estimate unorganized workers contribute to 60-65 % of the GDP, but do not get back their share. Political will for change is lacking. Mr. Bakshi, AITUC pointed that Arjun Sengupta report says 0.2 % of GDP should be directed as fund for this bill. But this should begin from 3% and keep increasing. Workers should only be charged a nominal registration fee. Component of refund should be there (in case workers retire, migrate etc).

In the session on interaction with trade unions, Dr. Sharath Babu, Professor, Dharwad University raised that there are discrepancies in the definition of unorganized sector as well as social security. There is need to simplify these definitions and implementation mechanisms. Mr. Harekrishna Debnath, Chairperson, National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) pointed that 3 % of the GDP is contributed by fisherpeople alone. We demand that government should contribute to all workers social security what it is gaining from the fishworkers. Subhash Bhatnagar of National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Sector Workers (NCC-USW) noted that the legislations made so far could not benefit the

unorganized workers as they were never designed for them He stressed on employment security and minimum wage as an integral part of any social security legislation.

In the session on interaction with peoples' movement, Dr. Rupa Kulkarni noted that though they pressurized the Maharashtra government to pass the bill on domestic workers, it has still not been implemented. Baba Adhav, President, NCC-USW, said that the struggle of unorganized workers is no longer confined to seminars and workshops, but is coming on the streets. Sanjay M.G., National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) quoting Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia said the time has come to eliminate all differences and come together on the issue of social security.

Among the others present were Mr. Manas Jana, NCDHR and Mr. Ganesh Ram Chandran, Chatisgarh Mukti Morcha.

The Third day of the meeting will concentrate on discussing strategies and preparing a document containing the main elements that should be a part of the social security legislation for unorganized workers.

J. John

On Behalf of the Consortium Team

Date: October 27, 2006

Place: Nagpur