

Press release

The 3 day National Convention on Unorganised Workers concluded today with a resolution that called for a comprehensive legislation to be introduced in the parliament ensuring social security and employment security for all workers in the unorganized sector and a separate legislation for agricultural workers. A plan of action towards this was also proposed including mass mobilization all over India, networking with like minded groups and putting pressure on the government at all levels including focused campaign at the constituency level seeking intervention by the parliament on this.

With an assurance from Satish Chaturvedi, Minister of Employment, Government of Maharashtra, special guest on the occasion, the meeting decided to make a representation to the Minister of Labour, Mr. Oscar Fernandes to demand the comprehensive legislation before the budget session (2007) of the parliament.

It was emphasized that the legislation should be administered through tripartite boards at various levels and sectors. The composition of these boards should have adequate representation of workers, women, dalits, OBCs, adivasis and unpaid workers. Unorganised sector workers social security fund must be through budgeted allocation by the central government and not based on the exclusive contribution of workers. The workers contribution must be by way of a one time registration fee subject to renewal for every 2 years. Minimum level of social security benefits must be quantified and the budgetary allocation towards the social security fund must have relative nexus to the benefits quantified.

Shri Satish Chaturvedi addressing the meeting emphasized that unorganized workers far outnumber the organized worker population. In Maharashtra alone there are about 2.5 crore unorganized workers. But there is one to raise their concerns. Social Security is the basic need of the masses and we need to ensure it by ensuring that the unorganised sector social security bill becomes a law and is implemented in its true spirit.

Eminent social activist and leader of National Alliance for Peoples' Movement (NAPM), Medha Patkar hailed that those who are called unorganized workers are actually more organized than the organized. The population of these workers is not less than 35 crore. These people should form the basis for a political will. Human rights are far above legal rights which essentially include right to live and right to livelihood. The government however, does not reflect the concerns

of this majority. As she raised that there has to be a fundamental calculation in the lives of workers, participants shouted the slogan *Garibon ka shram kitna, Haq kitna – hisab karo hisab do*. She further added that employment security is the primary requisite of social security, but this has been threatened in the wake of globalization. The government is changing labour laws to suit their agenda. This is clearly reflected in the Dr. Arjun Sengupta report in which social security is stated as a deficiency and does not relate it to the oppressive system under which the workers are toiling. She suggested that housing rights are also social security rights and should be given to all workers. She stressed on exploring the scope of public (community) and private partnership in implementing the law and called for a joint *samvad* and *sangharsh*.

Dr. Shanti Patel, prominent labour leader, ex MP and former Mayor of Mumbai noted that we need to eliminate discrimination based on caste gender and ethnicity if we want to unite and fight together. Mr. Ashok Ghosh, National Secretary, United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) assured full support in struggle for ensuring social security for the unorganized and called for help, support and association for a march towards a better tomorrow. Mr. Subhash Lomte, eminent socialist leader, underlined the need for a better coordination between all groups working with the unorganized workers and said that the struggle must be sustained if we want the social security bill to be implemented effectively.

A Nagpur Declaration approved by the convention called upon trade unions, community organisations, peoples' movements, NGOs and organizations that represent other segments of the working class, including the unemployed and workers in the informal economy to forge alliances to bring increased "power of representation" of the unorganized workers to the negotiation table.

J. John
On Behalf of the consortium team

Date: October 28, 2006
Place: Nagpur