

# RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN

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Shri. A.K. Antony  
Minister for Defence &  
Member of eGoM on Food Security  
Government of India

12<sup>th</sup> April 2010

## Right to Food

Dear Shri. A.K. Antony,

We write to you on behalf of the Right to Food campaign to express our concerns and demands in relation to the proposed National Food Security Act. The Right to Food campaign is a network of hundreds organisations and individuals from across the country.

As a member of the Empowered Group of Ministers (eGoM) on Food Security you must be aware of the debates around the National Food Security Bill. We are deeply disappointed with the narrow manner in which the Bill is being visualised, where the government seeks to restrict the proposed Act to only providing 25kgs of foodgrains to a limited number of Below Poverty Line (BPL) households. This is meaningless in the face of high malnutrition, spiralling prices, drought and deepening hunger. Such a minimalist view is inadequate to address the issue of providing food and nutrition security to the people of this country. Instead, the NFSA must be seen as an opportunity to not only address the injustice of large-scale hunger and malnutrition in the country but also to revitalise domestic food production and agriculture. For this, the Act must deal with at least some of the causes of hunger and provide each and every resident of this country with food entitlements.

The orders of Supreme Court already guarantee 35kgs of foodgrains per household along with other entitlements such as supplementary nutrition for young children, school mid-day meals, old age pensions, maternity benefits and so on. A legislation that reduces these entitlements, where the only aim seems to be curbing subsidies to the poor rather than ensuring basic social services to all cannot be accepted.

The scope of this Act must be broadened to ensure that it meets its basic objective: protecting *everyone* from hunger and malnutrition. Policies must be put in place to also ensure that the invasion of corporate interests in agricultural production and in food and nutrition policy is stopped immediately. In concrete terms, the campaign demands a comprehensive Food Entitlements Act, essential provisions of which include:

1. An overarching obligation to protect everyone from hunger;
2. Promotion of sustainable and equitable food production ensuring adequate food availability in all locations at all times;
3. Protection against forcible diversion of land, water and forests from food production;
4. Protection of food sovereignty and elimination of the entry of corporate interests and private contractors in food production, distribution and governance;
5. Promotion of decentralized food production, procurement and distribution systems;

6. Protection of interests of small farmers especially ensuring that farmers are given remunerative prices for food items.
7. A universal Public Distribution System (providing at least 14 kgs of grain per adult per month as well as 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil);
8. Special food entitlements for destitute households (including an expanded Antyodaya programme);
9. Consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court orders (e.g. cooked mid-day meals in primary schools and universalization of ICDS);
10. Support for effective breastfeeding (including maternity entitlements and crèches);
11. Elimination of all social discrimination in food-related matters;
12. Safeguards against cash transfers replacing food transfers under any nutrition-related scheme;
13. Strong accountability and grievance redressal provisions, including mandatory penalties for any violation of the Act and compensation for those whose entitlements have been denied.

Further, before finalizing the draft Bill to be discussed in the Cabinet, the eGoM must follow a consultative process wherein the opinion of different members of the civil society is gathered. Earlier processes of holding public consultations across the country, such as on the issues Bt Brinjal and the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, should be followed for discussion the Food Security Bill as well. A public engagement of this nature serves to deepen democracy and allows ordinary citizens to directly voice their concerns to policy makers.

We appeal to you to exercise your influence, as a Member of the eGoM, to ensure that these demands are met. We would also like you to raise these demands in the Parliament during the present session.

The Right to Food Campaign is planning to bring these demands to the notice of all Members of Parliament and the Union Government from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April 2010, when we will be staging a dharna cum relay fast outside Parliament House (as Jantar Mantar). We invite you to join us in solidarity and share your Party's views on this issue. We have also enclosed a copy of the draft "Food Entitlements Bill" of the Right to Food campaign which we hope will become the basis for the Government's draft Bill.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the steering group of the Right to Food Campaign:

Annie Raja, Anuradha Talwar, Arun Gupta, Aruna Roy, Arundhati Dhuru, Ashok Bharti,  
Colin Gonsalves, Jean Dreze, Kavita Srivastava, Mira Shiva, Paul Diwakar, Subhash Bhatnagar,  
Vandana Prasad, V.B.Rawat, Vinod Raina

Enclosed: Draft of the Right to Food Campaign's "Food Entitlements Act"

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