

RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN

Dr. Mihir Shah,
Member Planning Commission,
Yojana Bhawan, N Delhi

N.Delhi,
14th April 2010

Sub: Panel Discussion at the Constitution Club on 19th April, 2010 on the National Food Security Act, 2010

Dear Mihir,

We write to you on behalf of the Right to Food campaign to invite you to join us in solidarity in a “Dharna cum Relay Fast” outside Parliament from 15th to 19th April 2010, to protest the proposed Food “Insecurity” Act of the Government. We also take this opportunity to invite you to be a panelist on the 19th for a panel discussion on the 19th of April at the Constitution Club in N. Delhi.

You must be aware of the debates in the Empowered Group of Ministers (eGoM) on Food Security 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 food grains 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 not only to 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 food grains 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 has demanded 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.

We have also been demanding that the government must follow a consultative process in the formulation of this Act.

At the end of the dharna cum relay fast we are planning to hold a Panel Discussion with members from political parties, activists, academics and the media on the NFSA. We invite you to be one of the speakers at this Panel Discussion. The meeting will be held on 19th of April at 4.30pm at the Constitution Club, New Delhi. We hope you will be able to join us.

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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