

Right to Food Campaign

Secretariat

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To,
Dr Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister
Government of India

22 March 2010

Honorable Prime Minister,

We the members of [Right to Food Campaign](#) are writing to you to express our deep distress at the proposed draft bill of the National Food Security Act. From all accounts in the media, the bill that has been cleared by the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) for discussion in the Cabinet is a very minimalist draft which proposes an entitlement of 25 kgs of food grains at Rs.3 per kg for all BPL households.

We are shocked by the EGoM draft bill which does not address any of the nutritional needs of the people. This draft is not only a betrayal of the people of India but also is in contempt of the letter and spirit of the orders of the Supreme Court in the right to food case. This draft completely ignores the multiple entitlements which constitute the right to food of all ages of people and all sections of society including vulnerable groups.

We reject this draft!

The single entitlement proposed by the EGoM in the name of food security of the people by provisioning for only 25 kgs per household is in fact less than what is the current entitlement of 35 kgs which has been mandated by Supreme Court orders. A legislation that promises a “right” but in reality reduces the existing entitlement is completely unacceptable to the people of India and an affront on their dignity.

To make matters worse, the proposed Bill seeks to restrict this “entitlement” further to just BPL families (as per Planning Commission estimates). As you are undoubtedly aware, child malnutrition rates in India at 46% is amongst the highest in the world, and twice the rate of child malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover we have a unconscionably and shamefully high maternal mortality, a large part of which is attributable to the malnutrition amongst women.

Nothing short of a universal entitlement for the Public Distribution System would suffice to change the existing situation. Every adult resident of the country must be covered by the PDS with entitlements of 14 kgs of cereals (including nutritious millets) per month at Rs 2 per kilogram, 1.5 kilogram of pulses at Rs 20 per kg and 800 gms of cooking oil at Rs 35 per kg with children getting half the entitlements and the ration cards made in the name of female head of the household.

Sir, as you are well aware, targeting minimum food entitlements is to create food *insecurity*. If people classified outside BPL lists express a need for subsidised food - they clearly have a right to receive it as they need it for their sustenance. A universal entitlement for food is the only way that the country can ensure food security for all.

We also strongly feel that replacing food entitlements by cash will not bring about any food security to individuals instead the entire purpose of ensuring food and nutritional security will be defeated.

As you are aware, we are reeling under the worst food inflation in the last three decades and are dismayed at your Government's refusal to bring down prices. At such a time this bill makes a further mockery of growing hunger and malnutrition.

We are perturbed by the fact that the announcement of an inadequate and exclusionary PDS entitlement by the EGoM happened just when the Justice Wadhwa Committee report, which talks of an expansion of the PDS entitlement, was submitted to the Supreme Court. The timing chosen by the EGoM seems to be an attempt to sabotage the Supreme Court proceedings in the right to food case.

The multiple legal entitlements guaranteed by the Supreme Court of India already grant the right of 35kgs of food grains per household along with other entitlements such as reduced prices for the PDS grain under Antyodaya Anna Yojana for vulnerable sections of society, supplementary nutrition for infants and young children under ICDS, maternity entitlements under NMBS and Janini Suraksha Yojana, school mid-day meals, old age pensions and addressing needs of the homeless and urban poor, street children, single women and infants under six months.

Sir, we cannot accept any legislation that reduce the entitlements of the people. We need to ensure universal coverage of all basic needs, an imperative that cannot be ignored by the Indian State.

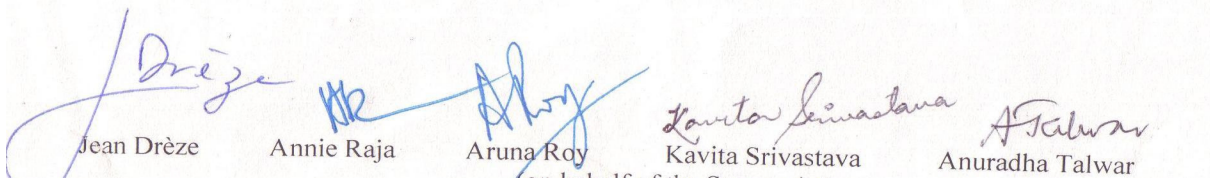
We urge you to intervene immediately to ensure that the National Food Security Act creates multiple entitlements, as we have outlined above.

The Act must also create an enabling environment for promoting food production by prioritising people's control over productive resources including land, forests and water. No diversion of these resources must be allowed as large sections of the people of this country only survive on access to these natural resources.

We hope the legislation on food security would provide these guarantees.

With Regards,

We are steering group of the Right to Food Campaign and members are:



Jean Drèze Annie Raja Aruna Roy Kavita Srivastava Anuradha Talwar



Vandana Prasad Biraj Patnaik

On behalf of all members below:

Annie Raja of *(National Federation for Indian Women)*
Anuradha Talwar and Madhuri Krishnaswamy *(New Trade Union Initiative)*
Arun Gupta & Radha Holla *(Breast Feeding Promotion Network of India)*
Arundhati Dhuru and Sandeep Pandey *(National people's Movement of India)*
Ashok Bharti *(National Conference of Dalit Organizations)*
Aruna Roy *(National Campaign for People's Right to Information)*
Asha Mishra and Vinod Raina *(Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti)*
Abhay Kumar *(Right to Food Collective-Karnataka)*
Biraj Patnaik, *(Office of Commissioners of Supreme Court),*
Balram *(Right to Food campaign-Jharkhand),*
Colin Gonsalves *(Human Rights Law Network)*
Devika Singh, *(Delhi FORCES)*
Dipa Sinha *(Working Group for Children under Six)*
Gangaram Paikra *(Chhattisgarh Kishan Mazdoor Andolan)*
Harsh Mander *(Aman Biradari),*
Jean Dreze *(Allahabad University),*
Kavita Srivastava *(People's Union for Civil Liberties),*
Kiran Bhatti, *(National Commission for Protection of Child Rights),*
Mira Shiva and Vandana Prasad *(Jan Swasthya Abhiyan),*
Manas Ranjan and Rajkishore Mishra *(Right to Food Campaign Collective-Orissa),*
Muddasani Kodanda Rama Reddy, *(RTF Collective Andhra Pradesh),*
Nikhil Dey *(Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan Rajasthan),*
Paul Diwakar *(National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights),*
Rupesh *(Right to Food Campaign Collective-Bihar),*
Reetika Khera, *(Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi)*
Subhash Bhatnagar *(National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Sector workers),*
Suresh Sawant & Ulka Mahajan *(Anna Adhikar Abhiyan-Maharashtra),*
Sachin Jain *(Right to Food Campaign Support Group-Madhya Pradesh),*

Sejal Dand (*Anna Suraksha Adhikar Abhiyan Gujarat*),
Samir Garg (*Adivasi Adhikar Samiti- Chhattisgarh*),
Sumitra Thacker- (*Anna Suraksha Adhikar Abhiyan-Gujarat*),
Sunil Kaul, (*The Ant, Chirang Assam*),
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V.B.Rawat (*Social Development Foundation*)

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