

RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN

September 23, 2010

LETTER TO THE CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERS OF THE NAC

RELEASED ON THE EVE OF THE MEETING TAKING PLACE TO DISCUSS THE CONTENTS OF THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT

ON 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2010

Dear National Advisory Committee members,

The Right to Food Campaign has been following closely the discussions of the NAC on the proposed food security bill. It has examined the media reports and some of the documents that were circulated at the NAC meeting held on the 30th of August. We are alarmed that the NAC is still dragging its feet regarding universalising the PDS. While the press release from the earlier NAC meeting on 14th July clearly stated “*while time-bound universalisation of foodgrain entitlements across the country may be desirable, initial universalisation in one-fourth of the most disadvantaged districts or blocks in the first year is recommended, where every household is entitled to receive 35kgs per month of foodgrains at Rs 3 a kg*”, the proposals discussed by the NAC on 30th August 2010 are bypassing this issue and insist on dividing the nation into the Aam and Antodaya category. This means the continuation of targeting (which has repeatedly failed) with only a replacement of the BPL- APL categorisation with a new nomenclature.

We are also surprised that when the country is faced with persistent hunger and malnutrition, the NAC is ignoring the present crisis of mountains of food stocks in FCI godowns with lacs of tonnes left to rot. As a body advising the Prime Minister it should have recommended immediate distribution of the surplus stocks for universalisation in one fourth districts or 150 of the poorest districts.

We would like the NAC to relook its proposed recommendations which bypasses the question of nutritional security. The present proposals provide for legal guarantees only for the distribution of cereal. The production, procurement, and storage of cereal, pulses and oils have been pushed into the background as mere enabling provisions (outside legal guarantees), thus leaving out the very foundation of agricultural revitalization on which these entitlements are to be established. Leaving out pulses and oils from the PDS food basket that is proposed to be legally guaranteed shows that nutritional security is a non - issue, when adult male and female anaemia and malnutrition is very high.

We are shocked that the expansion of food entitlements to a larger population and also the per capita increase in the quantum of even the cereal component is not being proposed or even considered. The arguments that funds are not available, in this case Rs. 1 lac 80 thousand crores, should not come in the way when India ranks 66th in the Global Hunger Index out of 88 poorest countries. “When would funds become a priority for eradication of poverty and hunger?”, we would like to ask. Why is the NAC which is supposed to be a pro poor - pro people's body not recommending that this should be top priority for budgetary allocations.

The lack of resources however does not come in the way of MPs in hiking their salaries in stroke or providing tax exemptions and rebates of over Rs. 5 lakh crores (in 2009-2010) majorly to the corporate sector or for the nineteen times increased allocation for the commonwealth games. It clearly shows that the “*Food For All Forever*” motto, poignantly stated in the NAC recommendations is mere lip service and not for actual implementation.

While in unambiguous terms we would like to welcome the inclusion of nutritional and cash programs for vulnerable groups and children's right to food, we are also concerned that the Government still considers niggardly amounts like pensions of Rs.400 per month sufficient for the survival of an old person. The quantum of grain per household is still being talked of at 25 kgs and 35 kgs which for most Indian households

would last for less than ten days. There are also no safeguards mentioned regarding NO to cash transfers to ensure that PDS provisions are not subverted easily.

When the proposed recommendations of the NFSB has kept the production, storage and procurement side out of the system of legal guarantees then why call this bill the Food Security Bill? It should be called the Food Entitlements Bill.

The Right to Food campaign demands for the Nation a comprehensive food security act which should include legal provisions relating to:

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, with comparable quantities for children);
8. Special food and cash entitlements for households (including an expanded Antyodaya programme for single women, old, dalits, Tribals, disabled, Transgender, landless and marginal farmers, daily wagers, slum dwellers, migrants etc.);
9. No use of technology for identification purpose which can violate the civil liberties and human rights of the people.
10. Consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court orders (e.g. cooked mid-day meals in primary schools and universalization of ICDS);
11. Support for effective breastfeeding (including skilled counseling, maternity entitlements and crèches);
12. Elimination of all social discrimination in food-related matters;
13. Safeguards against cash transfers replacing food transfers under any nutrition-related scheme;
14. Provisioning of Ration cards in the name of women.
15. 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 are,

The Steering group of the Right to Food Campaign

Annie Raja (National Federation for Indian Women), Anuradha Talwar and Madhuri Krishnaswamy (New Trade Union Initiative), Arun Gupta (Breast Feeding Promotion Network of India), Arundhati Dhuru (National People's Movement of India), Ashok Bharti (National Conference of Dalit Organizations), Anjali Bhardwaj, Nikhil Dey (National Campaign for People's Right to Information), Asha Mishra and Vinod Raina (Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti), Colin Gonsalves (Human Rights Law Network), Kavita Srivastava (People's Union for Civil Liberties), Mira Shiva and Vandana Prasad (Jan Swasthya Abhiyan), Paul Diwakar (National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights), Subhash Bhatnagar (National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Sector workers), V.B. Rawat

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