

# Right to Food Campaign (Secretariat)

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## ROTI BHAAT SATYAGRAH DEMANDING A UNIVERSAL PDS

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### MEDIA HANDOUT

The Right to Food Campaign today launches Roti Bhaat Satyagrah to demand for a universal PDS and other food security measures. Activists from across the country are participating in this Roti Bhaat Satyagrah to urge the government to universalise the PDS and take other steps to ensure food security for all. People from 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh have come today to protest against this government's inaction towards food security for all.

In spite of widespread hunger, reports of starvation deaths, high malnutrition rates, and rising inflation, we are yet to see any serious efforts by the Government of India towards guaranteeing people's access to food. Instead of curbing private sector hoarding that is leading to rising food prices, the government has added fuel to the fire by itself engaging in hoarding food grain in spite of the FCI having no place to store the same. In spite of increasing pressure from people and even the Supreme Court, there have been no concerted efforts to distribute the excess stocks of food grains lying in FCI godowns. The long promised National Food Security Bill is still awaited and the present draft circulated by the Government is far from adequate and instead of giving more rights actually aims to reduce the quantity of food grains people are entitled to as mandated by supreme court orders.

Many recent studies show that targeting of PDS benefits invariably ends up excluding large numbers of poor families. Further, it is clear that the PDS works much better in states where it is universal or "near-universal". By expanding the coverage of the PDS, reducing issue prices, and reforming the delivery system, many states have greatly improved the PDS and lowered leakages. It is time that these efforts are taken to scale by universalising and strengthening the PDS across the country. We believe that this (along with decentralised procurement and inclusion of millets in the PDS) will not only ensure that all vulnerable households are included, but also contribute to revitalising agriculture.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> October joint statement of the Deputy Chairperson of the Planning Commission and the Minister for Rural Development states that the poverty estimates of the Planning Commission will not be used to impose ceilings on the number of households to be included in different schemes and programmes. However, it does not make clear how many households will actually be included in government programmes. The joint statement states

that it will be ensured that the methodology to identify households based on data from the SECC will be consistent with the food security bill as it “*finally emerges*”. However, if we are to go by the existing draft of the food security bill, it is clear that all the problems associated with arbitrary ‘caps’ for allocations of food grains will remain. The SECC (BPL Survey) itself has set up arbitrary exclusion norms and will end up leaving out large numbers of vulnerable households from the BPL List.

It is disappointing to see that rather than using the present opportunity of the food security bill and excess food stocks to expand and strengthen the PDS, the Government is trying to replace the PDS with direct cash transfers. We strongly oppose this plan. A recent survey of the PDS in nine states shows not only that the PDS plays a significant role in ensuring food security but also that wherever the PDS functions reasonably well, a large majority of poor families much prefer food subsidies to cash transfers. Cash Transfers will on the other hand lead to higher inflation in the prices of food grain by giving corporate food giants the ability to hike prices at will.

An honest effort towards ensuring food and nutrition security for all demands that special efforts be made to protect children’s right to food. Nutritious locally produced food must be provided for all children. Supreme Court orders related to ICDS, including ‘universalisation with quality’ must be promptly implemented. Entitlements for vulnerable groups including social security pensions for the aged, single women, and persons with disabilities, maternity entitlements, and community kitchens in urban areas must also be put in place.

Through the ‘Roti Bhaat Satyagrah’ the Right to Food Campaign along with many others from across the country demands:

- A Universal PDS, so that all especially the food insecure, the vulnerable, and the deprived get included.
- Remunerative MSPs and decentralised procurement of rice, wheat and millets that will give farmers a decent income and enhance wage and employment opportunities for the agricultural labourers.
- Removal of poverty ratio based caps in allocation of resources by central government
- Universalisation with quality of ICDS including the provision of nutritious locally prepared food for all children.
- Entitlements including social security pensions for vulnerable persons – the aged, single women, and persons with disabilities, maternity entitlements, and community kitchens in urban areas must be ensured.

Please find enclosed the following documents:

1. Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India
2. Attack on PDS by Central Government
3. Parcha on BPL
4. Note on replacing PDS with cash transfers
5. NFSA Primer

### **The Steering Committee of the Right to Food Campaign:**

Annie Raja (National Federation for Indian Women), Anuradha Talwar, Gautam Modi and Madhuri Krishnaswamy (*New Trade Union Initiative*), Arun Gupta and Radha Holla (*Breast Feeding Promotion Network of India*), Arundhati Dhuru and Ulka Mahajan (*National Alliance of People's Movements*), Asha Mishra and Vinod Raina (*Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti*), Aruna Roy, Anjali Bharadwaj and Nikhil Dey (*National Campaign for People's Right to Information*), Ashok Bharti (*National Conference of Dalit Organizations*), Colin Gonsalves (*Human Rights Law Network*), G V Ramanjaneyulu (*Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture*), Kavita Srivastava and Binayak Sen (*People's Union for Civil Liberties*), Lali Dhakar, Sarawasti Singh, Shilpa Dey and Radha Raghwal (*National Forum for Single Women's Rights*), Mira Shiva and Vandana Prasad (*Jan Swasthya Abhiyan*), Paul Divakar and Asha Kowtal (*National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights*), Prahlad Ray and Anand Malakar (*Rashtriya Viklang Manch*), Subhash Bhatnagar (*National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Sector workers*), Jean Dreze and V.B Rawat (*Former Support group to the Campaign*), Ritu Priya (JNU)

### **Representatives of Right to Food (State campaigns):**

Veena Shatrugna, M Kodandram and Rama Melkote(Andhra Pradesh), Saito Basumaatary and Sunil Kaul (Assam), Rupesh (Bihar), Gangabhai and Sameer Garg (Chhattisgarh), Pushpa, Dharmender, Ramendra, Yogesh, Vimla and Sarita (Delhi), Sejal Dand and Sumitra Thakkar (Gujarat), Abhay Kumar and Clifton (Karnataka), Balram, Gurjeet Singh and James Herenj (Jharkhand), Sachin Jain (Madhya Pradesh), Mukta Srivastava and Suresh Sawant (Maharashtra), Tarun Bharatiya (Meghalaya), Chingmak Chang (Nagaland) Bidyut Mohanty and Raj Kishore Mishra, Vidhya Das, Manas Ranjan (Orissa), Ashok Khandelwal, Bhanwar Singh and Vijay Lakshmi (Rajasthan), V Suresh (Tamil Nadu), Arundhati Dhuru and Bindu Singh (Uttar Pradesh),