

# **RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN**

## **Collective Statement**

### **Preamble**

From mid-2001 onwards, a wide range of individuals and organisations around the country have been struggling for various aspects of the right to food, under the broad umbrella of “right to food campaign”. This movement grew in a relatively spontaneous and informal manner, based on a simple “foundation statement” (see below).

At the third Convention on the Right to Food and Work, held in Bodh Gaya in April 2007, the need was felt to clarify the basic commitments and principles of the Campaign. This Statement was prepared for this purpose, based on the deliberations of the Bodh Gaya Convention as well as on follow-up consultations held in state meetings and within the Provisional Steering Group.

This Statement has two parts. The first part (“Shared Commitments”) summarises the core commitments of the Right to Food Campaign, as they emerged from the Bodh Gaya Convention. It begins with the original Foundation Statement of the campaign, followed by a summary of other shared commitments that have evolved over the years.

The second part (“Organisational Principles”) outlines the Campaign’s basic organisational principles. The Campaign is a broad, non-sectarian platform based on local initiative and voluntary association. However, this decentralised approach does not obviate the need for some shared work principles and collective decision-making procedures. The second part of this Statement summarises the basic work principles that have been agreed so far.

## PART 1: SHARED COMMITMENTS

The following paragraphs summarise the core commitments of the Right to Food Campaign (starting with the original Foundation Statement), as they emerged from the Third Convention on the Right to Food and Work, held in Bodh Gaya in April 2007.

1. **Foundation Statement:** The “Right to Food Campaign” is an informal network of organisations and individuals committed to the realisation of the right to food in India. We consider that everyone has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and undernutrition. Realising this right requires not only equitable, decentralised and sustainable food systems, but also entitlements relating to livelihood security such as the right to work, land reform and social security. We consider that the primary responsibility for guaranteeing these entitlements rests with the state. Lack of financial resources cannot be accepted as an excuse for abdicating this responsibility. In the present context, where people's basic needs are not a political priority, state intervention itself depends on effective popular organisation. We are committed to fostering this process through all democratic means.

2. **Addressing the structural roots of hunger:** We are concerned about a number of interlinked recent developments that threaten to undermine the right to food, such as the deepening agrarian crisis, the continuing neglect of infants and children in public policy, persistent gender discrimination (together with absence of maternity entitlements), the dismantling of the public distribution system, and the disempowerment of Dalits, Adivasis and other disadvantaged groups (including the urban poor). We also view with alarm the growing influence of corporate interests in food and agrarian policy, involving for instance the promotion of processed baby foods, genetically modified seeds and untested biotechnology at the cost of food safety and nutrition, and corporate support for unfair international treaties such as the Agreement on Agriculture.

3. **No coercive displacement:** Coercive displacement is a major source of disruption of people's control over natural resources and food insecurity. We are therefore opposed to coercive displacement of people (especially in the context of dams, military areas, Special Economic Zones and other elitist projects), and we condemn police violence on people and movements resisting coercive displacement.

4. **Resisting discrimination and communalism:** We are concerned about the ominous growth of communal and anti-democratic tendencies in the country, and committed to resisting them. Our commitment to the right to food is inseparable from our commitment to social justice and democratic values, and implies firm opposition to communalism in any form. Democracy is premised on the fundamental equality of all citizens. Therefore it is incompatible with discrimination based on caste, gender, religion or other attributes. We are committed to putting these concerns at the centre of our work on the right to food.

5. **Universalization with equity:** We advocate universal provision of quality basic services and facilities related to nutrition, health and education (particularly the Public Distribution System, the Integrated Child Development Services and the Mid Day Meal Scheme), with priority to disadvantaged groups and special recognition of the rights of young children to nutrition and care.

6. **Transparency:** The Right to Food Campaign is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability in all its activities. This includes open access to campaign documents and full transparency in financial matters.

## **PART 2: ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

The Right to Food Campaign believes in a broad based alliance of organizations and individuals who are committed to the realization of the right to food for the people in India. It encourages collective action on all matters concerning the campaign and encourages the formation of coalitions and networks at the district, state or other levels. It believes that decentralized, but organized, action and participatory decision making are the only means by which such a campaign can be successful and sustainable. It also believes that no single organisation or set of organizations has the sole right to organize for the right to food.

### **Annual Convention**

1. The Right to Food Campaign shall have an annual convention. One of the aims of the convention will be to lay out broad principles and priorities that will guide the work of the Campaign until the next convention.
2. The gap between two conventions shall not be more than two years.
3. On the occasion of the annual convention, a General Council of the campaign shall be held. The General Council will act as an open forum where every person or organization involved in the campaign has an opportunity to be heard and to participate in the collective decision-making process.

### **Steering Group**

4. The Campaign shall have a Steering Group. The Steering Group shall provide direction to the Campaign's activities. However, it will be chiefly guided by the mandate and policies laid out at the annual convention.
6. The Steering Group shall consist of the following:
  - 1 One designated member of each of the national networks that constituted the "provisional Steering Group" when this Charter was prepared (the list is given in the Appendix).
  - 2 Designated members of other national networks that may be inducted into the Steering Group over time.
  - 3 Designated members of state campaigns where one or more coordinated state level network exists.
  - 4 Invited members of local campaigns and other committed individuals, as may be inducted into the Steering Group from time to time for a pre-specified period (not less than one year).
6. All inductions into the Steering Group will be done through consensus of the existing members of the Steering Group, subject to endorsement at the General Council.
7. The Steering Group shall designate one of its members as convener.
8. The Steering Group shall meet at least twice a year. At least one of these meetings will be an open meeting to which all members of the General Council will be welcomed.

9. The Steering Group shall submit a report to the General Council.

10. The Secretariat will be guided and supported by an Advisory Group, consisting of three or more members of the Steering Group who are willing to give time for the day to day supervision of the secretariat.

### **Secretariat**

11. The Campaign shall have a Secretariat. The Secretariat derives its mandate from the annual convention of the Right to Food Campaign, and plans its work in the light of the convention's deliberations and decisions.

12. The Secretariat shall report to the Steering Group on a regular basis.

13. The basic responsibilities of the Secretariat include the following:

- a) Facilitating the annual convention of the Right to Food Campaign.
- b) Facilitating follow-up activities after the annual convention.
- c) Maintaining the Campaign website ([www.righttofoodindia.org](http://www.righttofoodindia.org)).
- d) Circulating regular information about activities of the Campaign, and matters relating to the right to food, through electronic "Updates" or otherwise.
- e) Facilitating communication and coordination within the Campaign.
- f) Facilitating research, investigation and training on various aspects of the right to food.
- g) Facilitating capacity building processes and strengthening of the Campaign (including training and material generation).

14. The Secretariat will have at least one remunerated worker. In addition, it may have resource teams working with it on a voluntary basis. One person (remunerated or volunteer) will act as coordinator of the Secretariat.

15. The Secretariat will have a bank account, operated jointly by the coordinator of the Secretariat and one member of the Steering Group.

16. The Secretariat is committed to full transparency in financial matters. The accounts of the Secretariat will be audited every year, presented to the Steering Group, and posted on the Campaign website.

### **Thematic Groups**

17. The Right to Food Campaign welcomes the involvement of other actors (organisations, parties, networks, activists etc.) in issues related to the right to food. One way in which the Campaign seeks to build bridges with other actors, and to facilitate their involvement in the Campaign, is through the formation of thematic groups. These groups consist of individuals and organisations both within and outside the Campaign, who work together on a particular aspect of the right to food. For instance, in 2004 and 2005, People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) played an active role in the campaign for a national Employment Guarantee Act. It is hoped that other thematic groups will be formed.

### **Joint Statements and Activities**

18. Joint statements and activities initiated in the collective name of the Right to Food Campaign shall be endorsed unanimously by all members of the Steering Group.

### **Legal Action**

19. The Right to Food Campaign gathered strength from the “right to food case”, a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court (*PUCL vs Union of India and Others, Civil Writ Petition 196 of 2001*). In the context of this PIL, the Supreme Court has appointed Commissioners to monitor the implementation of court orders on the right to food. While this legal process is independent of the Campaign, there has been a close association (including mutual consultation) between the two, which is expected to continue.

### **Funding**

20. Since the Right to Food Campaign is a decentralised network of autonomous organisations and individuals, participating groups are expected to organise their own funding from appropriate sources.

21. Funding agencies and donor led networks will not be a part of the campaign.

22. The Secretariat shall be funded from the following sources: (1) individual donations in rupees with no strings attached, and (2) sales of Campaign material prepared by the Secretariat. Institutional grants from Indian sources may be accepted in exceptional circumstances, on a case by case basis with the unanimous approval of the Steering Group.

### **Status of this Statement**

23. This Statement is the common ground of all organisations and individuals involved in the Right to Food Campaign. It shall not be modified, except by the Steering Group on a consensus basis, with the approval of the General Council.

### **APPENDIX- PROVISIONAL STEERING GROUP MEMBERS**

1. National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)
2. Human Rights Law Network (HRLN)
3. People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)
4. National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM)
5. Jan Swasthya Abhiyaan (JSA)
6. National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI)
7. Bhartiya Gyan Vigyaan Samiti (BGVS)
8. National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Sector Workers (NCC-USW)
9. National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
10. National Confederation of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR)
11. New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI)
12. Former “Support Group” of the Right to Food Campaign
13. Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI)