

Press Release on World Food Day October 16, 2008

The world is facing unprecedented food crisis in recent times. Hunger and poverty have been intensified in last decades, despite several promises and interventions like Millennium Development Goals and promises taken during World Food Summit earlier. We are further facing the greatest threats on food security due to impacts of climate change. It is obvious that the impacts are more severe among most vulnerable groups/communities i.e. small & marginal peasants, fishers, tribal, dalits and women. South Asia is the home of maximum numbers of poor and hungry in the world and around 340 million hungry people live in South Asia. Around 25% people in India live BPL and suffer from absolute poverty, hunger and starvation. Despite the fact that around 70% rural population in West Bengal (WB) depends on agriculture, the government has virtually disowned the sector, and disempowered small and marginal peasants, by converting fertile agriculture land for so called industrialisation. This is being done, when more than 50,000 industries have been closed down in last 30 years in the state due to poor planning of the government. As a result of this more than 1.5 million people lost their livelihoods. Till date the state is doing little to rejuvenate these industries or to utilise the lands of those closed industries for new industrialisation

It is well known that Oct 16th is celebrated as World Food Day (WFD) as per the decision of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN). There are various national and international human rights instruments existing in India and at global levels to ensure right to food and livelihoods for all citizens and as per these instruments nation state has accountability to people and the people are considered as right holders and the state as duty bearers. These human rights framework also elaborates the duties of the state i.e. to respect, protect and fulfil the Right to Food (RTF) of people. Respecting refers to not destroying existing RTF standards and means for procurement of food by people, at the same time it also asks the state to acknowledge and respect existing human rights standard associated with RTF. Protect bound obligations call for direct interventions of the state to protect people from invasion/attacks by third parties, like MNCs, due to which livelihoods are being destroyed. Here the state should play a proactive role to control the 'destroyers' and to take punitive steps against them. Finally fulfilment bound obligations are provisions, policies and programmes to ensure peoples effective access to food. This includes ensuring peoples access to land, water, forest and other productive resources, ensuring peoples access to employment and making food safety net functional.

However, in the era of neo-liberalisation, with grave concern we are observing that the central as well as the state government of West Bengal (WB) are following such principles which are violating RTF and are increasing poverty and hunger in this country. In WB, in the name of so called development, the state has taken active role

in displacing and evicting poor from their homes and hearth and has allowed MNCs to destroy peoples livelihoods further. The incidents in Singur and Nandigram are living examples of violations of rights of commons. In Singur the state has been protecting the interest of MNC TATA for last two years, by depriving local poor of their RTF and livelihoods. Land has been forcefully acquired in Singur and has been handed over to TATA for developing a car assembling unit there. MOU between TATA and the state has not made public, despite the fact that the whole land acquisition was done in the name of 'public purpose'. The state government invested crores of public money to protect TATA in Singur but at last due to strong peoples resistance at local, national and international levels, TATA has decided to abandon Singur and has shifted their assembling unit elsewhere. The whole incident is an example of violation of RTF of poor in Singur who are suffering for last two years due to land alienation and loss of livelihoods and this incident also exemplifies the superficial attitude of TATA towards its self declared 'Corporate Social Responsibilities'. However, this is an old practice of TATA and they did the same thing in kalinganaggar IN Orissa, in Lanjhuguda in Chattisgarh, in Bangladesh and now in Singur. They have occupied land in the name of developing industries and the governments have complied with their requirements at the cost of RTF of millions. But the sad reality is TATA has never really contributed to industrialisation and employment generation in above mentioned projects in those areas/states. They shifted to other locations, but kept the land under their control and the state did little to return those lands to their real owners i.e. poor peasants and tribal people.

We have published a documentation of the above cases where both state governments and TATA fall short of their respective human rights and corporate social responsibilities. This publication has an elaborate analysis of corporate social responsibilities as adopted by TATA with concrete examples on how TATA is disobeying the same in many of its projects including Singur.

Recently TATA has moved away from Singur. In this connection we would like to draw your attention to the states responsibilities to protect RTF of the people in Singur and not to promote the corporate interests/profits of TATA and urge the government followings:

- Immediately stop ongoing violations of RTF in Singur and provide victims with adequate compensation, rehabilitation and protection
- As TATA has already moved away from Singur the state should take immediate step to give back the agricultural lands to those unwilling farmers who have refused to give up their struggles for RTF
- Refrain from acquiring fertile agricultural land for industrialisation as this will reduce food production and will increase poverty and hunger in the state
- Take steps against TATA for destroying livelihoods of poor in Singur and ask TATA to compensate adequately for this damage.
- Combat neo-liberal policies which are reducing poors' access to productive resources, employment and access to safety nets

- Discard all SEZs in the state as expansion of SEZ would intensify land alienation and would intensify vulnerability of the marginal communities
- Ensure that RTF is progressively realised and constitutional provision of addressing hunger as a fundamental right is fully respected and implemented.

On the occasion of World Food Day we remember those peasants, women and youths who have laid down their lives in Singur and Nandigram while fighting for their RTF. We urge the government to ensure that their families get justice and further violations are stopped with an immediate effect. We would also like to call upon TATA to refrain from depriving poor of their rights and to oblige with its CSRs.

We hope our publication present a clear analysis of the behaviour of TATA in this subcontinent and their role in violations of RTF. We further hope that the publication will be able to contribute in unmasking the myth that TATA's investment would have significantly changed the hunger problem in the state & elsewhere. The publication will remind us that addressing hunger in our state would require structural changes as well as implementation of such reform policies which are based on human rights principles. Agrarian Reform, which is only half heartedly implemented in the state, is a precondition to end hunger in a country like India. This publication will prove that there is no shortcut to development and only bringing big investments from MNCs does not ensure an inclusive development process. In the World Food Day, We the NGOs/CSOs of WB express our solidarity to the struggling peasants in WB, India and abroad, who are fighting for their legitimate RTF and we would also like to remind the state and other powerful actors about their duties and responsibilities in this regard. CS has played the most significant role in bringing effective changes in powers structure, enabling poor to access food. Today we reaffirm our commitments and responsibilities in this regard and hope to play a constructive role in the true development of the state through a balanced rejuvenation of pro-people industry and growth of sustainable agriculture. The eminent personalities who were present in the press conference were as follows :

Shri Biplab Halim, Shri Debobrata Bandyopadhyay , Prof. Sunanda Sanyal, Shri Deepak Ghosh, Dr. Amiya Samanta, Shri Chandan Pal and Prof. Satyabrata Chowdhury



(Biplab Halim)
On behalf of the organisers

FIAN West Bengal , SAAPE-South Asia, PAN-AP, IMSE, Socio-Legal Aid Research and Training Centre, Forum of Voluntary Organisations-West Bengal, Indian Federation of Toiling Peasants, East Coast Fish Workers Union, West Bengal Gandhi Peace Foundation, Peoples Action Network for National Integration and Communal Harmony, Right to Information Network- West Bengal, Peoples Coalition on Food Sovereignty, West Bengal (South) Wood Works Workers Union, South Asian Peasants Coalition, Rural Exploitation and Atrocities Prevision Forum, Asian Peasants Coalition, Earth Care, International Planning Committee (South Asia), Nadi Banchao Gram Banchao Committee, Ekak Matra, Singur Uched Virodhi Krishak Sangram Sahayak Committee.