

## Press Release

National convention on social security for unorganized workers was inaugurated today at Morbhawan, Sitabuldi, Nagpur. The meeting was inaugurated by four tribal workers by lighting a *mashal*. Anil Deshmukh, Minister of Works, Maharashtra Government was the Chief Guest on the occasion. The three day convention is focusing on the issue of social security for the unorganized workers, particularly in the context of the recent debates regarding the bills proposed on social security.

On the first day, the convention looked at the various dimensions of social security and what it means for the unorganized workers. Placing the meeting in a context, Mr. J. John, Executive director, Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) said that legislation on social security is a strategy to strengthen the unorganized workers economically and socially, to give them an identity and to ensure their rights. Legislation is particularly important in a situation where all the existing laws have an implicit exclusion of unorganized workers. He emphasized on the indivisibility of employment regulation from any social security legislation. Mr. Marc Socquet, Social Security Specialist, International Labour Organisation (ILO) stressed that social security benefits are essentially a part of universal human rights. In India which is the largest democracy of the world, social protection remains the biggest challenge. Over 300 million unorganized workers in India are deprived of these benefits. He further noted that these people who earn less than \$ 2 a day cannot be asked to pay for their social security and health protection. He noted that India is at a cross road where it has to decide whether to opt for social insurance or commercial insurance and cautioned that insurance, premium and surplus cannot be left to private companies to decide. The growing phenomenon of social exclusion can only be broken if we achieve the objectives proposed by the present bills.

Speaking on the occasion Dr. K.P. Kannan, member, National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) which has drafted the latest bill on social security, said that the present social security report of NCEUS has 2 aspects a) bill and b) scheme. He emphasized on the legislative aspect of the bill and noted that it is important that a bill be introduced in the parliament. He explained that the present bill has 2 levels – first is a central government funded social security which is the basic level, applicable to all unorganized workers and at the second level, the state governments can add on according to their capacity. Further he stated that while there is a general consensus among both state and central governments for passing the bill, effective implementation of the provisions can only be ensured by organizing the workers and fighting for their rights.

Mr. Dorairajan, Hind Mazdoor Sabha said that the problems of informalisation among the organized sector are due to the fact that we have failed to address the problems of the unorganized sector in the past 50 years. Mr. Saptarshi, eminent socialist and labour leader criticized the present trade unions for not organizing in the unorganised sector giving the example of garment industry. Dr. RKA Subramania, Social Security Association of India criticized the present bill for not having the provision of unemployment benefits. Dr.

Shanti Patel, eminent trade unionist, ex MP and former Mayor of Mumbai chaired the input session. He added his deep concerns on the issue of unorganized sector social security and expressed the hope that the *triveni* of NGOs, trade unions and people's movements will definitely lead the struggle of unorganized workers.

In the coming two days the convention will further explore the issues of employment regulation versus social security, discrimination and social security benefits, structure of social security administration and funds, need for a separate legislation for agricultural workers, feasibility of insurance based social security, women and social security and new economic reforms and unorganized sector social security and conclude with document on the main elements that are an integral part of a social security legislation.

J. John  
On Behalf of the Consortium Team