

Press Release

Call for Rejecting the UNORGANISED WORKERS SOCIAL SECURITY BILL, 2007' placed on the website by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India

A consortium of 14 NGOs (*listed on the left of this letter*) organised a National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers from October 26-28 at Morbhawan, Sitabuldi, Nagpur, Maharashtra placing social security as a fundamental right of workers. The convention had been a successful historic event, which registered participation of over 800 participants/ representatives of more than 300 NGOs, Trade Unions, Peoples Movements, community organizations, government authorities, state ministers and intellectuals etc. After three day inter active sessions on various aspects of social security issues we adopted Nagpur Declaration and thereafter submitted a memorandum to the government on 11th December 2006 in the labour ministry detailing our demands and aspirations of unorganised workers.

The government has placed a draft bill on the website of Ministry of Labour in the first week of February 2007 seeking comments of stakeholders and others by 15th February 2007. The 'UNORGANISED WORKERS SOCIAL SECURITY BILL, 2007' has been examined by this consortium and would like to make the following points:

1. The draft 'Unorganised Workers Social Security Bill 2007' is not comprehensive; the provisions of employment regulation, livelihood protection and dispute resolution are deliberately taken out.
2. The draft bill is merely charity handout rather than a document that affirms the rights of workers based on the principle of social justice.
3. The term Social Security has not been defined in the current Bill. The components of social security as in ILO definition together with security needed immediately after disaster like earth quakes, flood etc and additional social security needed for dalits, women, tribal and other marginalized workers with decent work should be the necessary components of definition of 'Social Security'.
4. The definition of 'worker' excludes those getting above Rs. 6500/- and unpaid women workers. The wage ceiling for different social security benefits could have been left to the powers of boards in the schemes so as to make it flexible.

5. The bill deliberately avoids affirming the rights of unorganised workers; their right to organise, rights of women, dalits, tribal and other marginalized workers, right to social security and other labour rights.
6. Accountability of the government has not been established. a. Accountability from Consolidated Fund of India. b. Accountability of the Board to the Parliament.
7. Representation of dalits, women, tribal and other marginalized workers in the Social security boards and in administration of social security is ignored.
8. Affirmative provisions concerning these marginalized sections have not been incorporated.
9. The bill undermines the autonomy of the Social security boards.
10. The role of the Social Security Boards and the government are confusing and overlapping. The bill does not prescribe clear autonomy of the Board.
11. The government has blatantly ignored the demands of trade unions, peoples' organizations, this consortium and other community organisations. This Bill is a shell without content; a very diluted, narrow and rejectable attempt of the labour ministry.

In the light of the points given above, we strongly reject this bill in its present form.

Moreover, the manner in which this bill has been floated on the net giving very little time for the citizens to respond to it throws serious doubts on the intentions of the government. We wonder whether there is a deliberate attempt to create confusions and further delay a comprehensive legislation for unorganized workers.

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For consortium**