

Press release

Formation of South Asian Parliamentary Forum On food sovereignty

Two days parliamentary conference demand land rights to the tillers

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First day

Islamabad: South Asian countries need to make urgent efforts to secure food sovereignty and strict legislation should be carried out to ensure provision of foods for over one billion of people of the region.

This was the consensus of Pakistani, Indian, Nepali, Bangladeshi and Afghan intellectuals, right activists and parliamentarians at first day of a two-day conference on Food Sovereignty organized by Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee here on Sunday. The event was organized in association with South Asian Alliance For Poverty Eradication (SAAPE).

Speaking on the occasion advisor to President on media affairs MNA Farah Naz Isphani said retrogressive forces had become so powerful in the country that they opposed all progressive measures of the government.

The government faces a stiff resistance from blaspheme law to land reforms from these retrogressive elements, she said, adding that the role of Shariat Court reversing the land reforms decision of PPP government was lamentable.

Farooq Tariq of Labour Party said that poverty had out of one billion hungry people 633 million live in South Asia, adding that ruthless privatization in the region and onslaught of neo-liberal economy was responsible for growing hunger and poverty in the region.

Citing statistics from the Pakistan Planning Commission 2009, Tariq said poverty had jumped from 23.9 to 37.5 per cent from 2005 to 2009. He said in 2005 35.5 million people were living below the poverty line, which rose to 64 million in 2008.

MNA Hamayun Saifullah of PML-Q and Riaz Fatyana MNA said that five million feet hectares water was reducing every year causing many difficulties for the farmers. He said that the government should construct small dams to stop the wastage of millions of gallons water besides evolving a national policy on the issue of water.

Prem Dangal, secretary general All Nepal Peasant Federation, said that the countries of the region would have to take revolutionary steps to secure food sovereignty. He said that if the government of the region took pro-people's policies, the masse would come to defend such policies as they did in the case of Venezuela.

Probadh Panda of Indian Communist Party, member Indian Lok Sabah, said that only three Indian

states carried out an effective land reforms programme namely Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura. In most of the other states these reforms did not prove to be very effective. He said that his party did not have influence over the other states.

He said that CPI would stage a big sit-in in Dehli, which is being supported by workers, peasants and other sections of the society. Most of the peasant movement leaders in Paksitan participated in the proceedings. The conference went on for over 8 hours in a hotel in Islamabad chaired by Riaz fatyana MNA.

Islamabad: 24th January 2011, second day

Two days round table caucus attend by parliamentarian and civil society representatives from five countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. The two day caucus was organized by Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee in coordination with South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication at Islamabad Hotel. It discussed and agreed to form a South Asian Parliamentary Forum on Food Sovereignty. There are 630 million people in these five countries facing food scarcity and we need to take urgent actions to safe this huge population from further sufferings.

The two days caucus demanded that Mozaraeen of Military and other public Farms should immediately be granted land rights to fight against poverty and hunger among the land less peasantry.

The caucus was attended and addressed by Saeedul Haque MP and chairman standing committee on food and disaster Bangladesh, Mr. Probadh Panda MP Lok Sabha India, Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali federal minister and education and information technology and former federal foreign minister , Farah Naz Ishfahani MNA, Raheela Baluch MNA, Jamila Gilani MNA, Hamuon Saif Ullah Khan MNA, Riaz Fatyana MNA and chairman parliamentary committee on human rights, Senator Hasil Bizinjo, Senator Dr. Abdul Malik Baluch, Saeed Hashmi provincial minister Baluchistan, Keshab Lal Shershtha fomer federal minister Nepal, Prem Dangal general secretary All Nepal peasant Federation, Arif Afghani chairman Afghan labour Revolutionary organization, Mustafa Kamal Bangladesh Equity BD, Syed karim Ullah and Syed Abbas Jan Afghanistan.

The two days caucus was also attended by civil society activists and academics and they include Asif Sharif, Professor Maqbool Babri, Shakeel Ahmad SDPI, Dr Ayub Goraya, Mian Aftab Ahmad and Shafqat Nagmi assistant federal secretary ministry of food and agriculture Pakistan and Farooq Tariq secretary Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee,

Giving details of the two days caucus, Riaz Fatyana chairman standing committee on human rights said that the forum will present a comprehensive alternative plan to address the issue of hunger in the all the South Asian countries. The recommendations included South Asia common market for food and agriculture to enhance the food sovereignty in the region and mutual support during the crisis, to establish agriculture chambers at district level. It suggested ways to ensure adulteration of food and agricultural inputs and products. It was agreed that step should be taken to ensure supply and efficient use of water. It was agreed that access to food as the first and most important human right. At was suggested that the government in the region should rise above the "onion and garlic wars" and support each other in increasing the food availability.

The two days parliamentary round table caucus deliberated and evolved strategies for enhancing food sovereignty and provision of fair wage to agricultural workers and ownership of the land to the peasants. The caucus resolved that one of the most important step for enhancing food sovereignty is land to the tillers and they must have ownership rights of the land that they till.

The rampant privatization of agricultural inputs including fertilizers and pesticides has increased the cost of the production beyond the reach of the small farmers and has caused the degradation and poisoning of the land and live stock. The multinational companies dealing in agricultural input have put the small farmers under debts and financial crisis by increasing the prices unrealistically. They continue to misguide the farmers towards excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides and government agencies and extension departments of government have miserably failed to provide knowledge and wisdom based advices to the peasants to the extent to the official agriculture department magazine now carries advertisements for the multinational companies and their products. The two days caucus agreed to bring solidarity among the peasant movements in the region. It demanded that government of the region should put an end to the neo liberal policies. It must stop to please WTO and World Bank. WTO has put the agriculture at the mercy of the multinational companies and imperialist countries.

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