

Pakistan: the AMP has decided to relaunch the movement of land ownership

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Contents

- [Another major gathering of \(...\)](#)
- [Thousands in attendance](#)
- [A new mass meeting of peasants](#)

Another major gathering of peasants in Okara

Thousands of peasants will get together in Kalyana Military Estate Okara on 25 March 2009 in a peasants convention organized by Anjman Mozareen Punjab (AMP). They are demanding the ownership rights of the land they are cultivating over 100 years. Anjman Mozareen Punjab (Punjab Tenant Organization) is fighting for land rights at the Military owned agriculture farms in different district of Punjab.

The peasant convention is part of the land ownership rights campaign that has started this year by Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee in association with AMP. Earlier two large gatherings have been organised in Renalakhurd and Depalpur. On 29 March, another massive gathering will take place in Benghali Military Farms in Lahore. A major peasant conference is planned for 17-18 April 2009 at Okara Military Farms as well.

Peasants leaders from all the different districts will speak at the convention in Kalayana Military Estate in Okara. Over 5000 peasants are expected to participate in this convention. Majority of that will be peasants women.

Here is some back ground details of the campaign.

Anjman Mozareen Punjab has once again started a campaign for land rights. 68000 acres of land is in possession of Military Farms and Army Welfare Trust. The land is located in Lahore, Okara and Pakpattan district of Punjab. The agricultural land is mainly cultivated by tenants.

The tenants were asked to become lessee in year 2000 by Musharraf dictatorship. The scheme was to hand over this land to multi national companies for corporate farming. The tenants resisted and formed Anjman Mozareen Punjab (Punjab tenant Association). The AMP became a vehicle of resistance with the help of progressive political and social organizations.

The resistance by AMP became one of the most militant movements of peasantry in Punjab history. Instead of becoming lessee, they refused to pay the share, they were paying as tenants. The women played the leading role. Seven were killed, scores injured and hundreds arrested during the peaceful but militant movement.

During the movement, Pakistan People Party and Muslim League Nawaz promised to give this land

to the tenants when they will come to power. A year has passed while both in power. Not much is done to fulfill this promise.

On 17 April 2008, over 5000 tenants and peasants participated in a peasant conference held at Okara Military Farms on the international day of peasants. They reminded the both parties to do what they promised.

We heard that three member's federal cabinet committee is formed to solve this issue. Not a single meeting of this committee took place during one year.

In November 2008, we revealed in a press conference that some agriculture land in Renala Khurd belonging to tenants is been allotted to some military generals and officers in 2007 by the then Punjab government of Pervaiz Ilanhi. We made it clear that we are the occupants of this land and we will not hand over this land to the military officers.

In December 2008, I reminded Mian Nawaz Sharif in a meeting at his residence about his promise. He was very keen to do something. He asked my contact and promised that he will take initiative to have a meeting with the tenants. There are no developments until now in this regard either. I also told him that the land is owned by Punjab government and military is occupying the land without any legal documents.

On 19 January 2009, over 2000 tenants gathered at Renalkhurd in a public meeting by AMP demand the land rights. The police occupied the platform in the morning and asked the organizers to cancel this public meeting. They refused and later when the peasants started to arrive in the tractor trolleys, the police fled from the place and the meeting went ahead.

On 16 February 2009, the AMP leadership including Mehr Abdul Satar, Nadeem Asharaf, Shabir Choudry, Liaqat Ali alongside with Peoples Right Movement convener Asim Sajad addressed a press conference in Islamabad. Daily Dawn reported the press conference in detail with the title "tillers of military farms seek ownership rights". The report says, "When the state repression at Okara Military Farms was at its peak in 2002 and 2003, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif spoke out in favour of the tenants and promised that one of their first action upon coming to power would be to withdrawal all false criminal cases against the tenants and allot them the land they had been tilling over 100 years. The APM and PRM office bearers pointed out that a year's time was sufficient for the elected government to take the necessary measures to transform property rights to the tenants".

They have decided to print posters, leaflets and stickers to fly post all over the country. It is estimated that over 20,000 peasants will attend the Okara conference on 17-18 April 2009. The conference will be attended by the peasant representatives from all over the country and internationally, The AMP is part of the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee. PKRC has decided to coordinate the campaign and work alongside with AMP in mobilization.

Thousands in attendance

Dear all,

I started writing this report during the peasant convention in Kulyana Estate on 26 March. But I

could not finish it. Anyhow, I am completing it now for your information.

I am now sitting at the platform of a peasant convention in Kulyana Estate in Okara district. Over 5000 in attendance. Over a 1000 peasant women sitting side by side. Five different private channels are covering the event. ARY television have brought equipment to broadcast it live. It was told by Wadood Mushtaq of ARY that it was broadcasted live for 25 minutes. This covered the arrival of several rallies of peasants coming with red flags to join the convention. There are dozens of tractor trolleys standing out the convention venue which has brought the peasants to the place. The convention is held at an open field with three large trolleys used for platform. It is all covered and peasants are sitting on chairs and on the floor.

There is a lot of enthusiasm in the convention. The land here is very fertile. Over a 100 year ago, It was promised to the tenants that if they cultivate the land it will be given to them. But instead it was allotted to retired military generals and they are now allottees of this land of over 6000 acres. There are 14 villages in the area with over 35000 inhabitants.

These military officials are then sub contracting this land to the native peasants. These peasants are now organised in Anjman Mozareen Punjab. They are demanding the ownership right of this land and an end of contract system. In some villages, the contract amount of one acre has gone up to over 25000 Rupees (\$320).

Badran Bibi, a local peasant women leader told the convention that in our villages, there is no clean drinking water, no schools, no graveyards, no basic health facilities and it seems that we are not human beings. She told to the gathering that we are not going to accept it in any case, we are organised now and united struggle of men and women will win.

Nadeem Ashraf vice president Anjman Mozareen Punjab spoke of the militant actions of Mozareen in Punjab and warned the government that if this land is not given to the tenants then a massive movement will continue. He said that gone are days when the retired military general could do anything here, we will fight back this unjust contract system. Nadeem Ashraf who is also elected union Nazim (mayor) in Renalkhurd joined the convention leading a large rally earlier from his constituency.

It was Bushra Khaliq, general secretary Women Workers Help Line who received the best continuous applause from the convention. She spoke of women fighting for land rights becoming an international example for other to follow. Bushra congratulated the organisers to mobilize than many women for this convention. She said this movement will win because women are leading it and are owning this movement. She warned the government of a Dharna in Lahore where hundreds of working class women will also join the peasant women and men. She asked the men not to indulge in domestic violence. Bushra demand an equal share of land for women if this land is given to the peasants.

Asim Sajad Akhtar of Peoples Rights Movement reminded the PPP government of their promise for granting this land to tenants. He disclosed that the PPP government has received a letter from General Head Quarter of Army that they should look at least one million acre of state land that is to be allotted to military personal. He told that tenants in Kot Addo district were asked to vacate the state land after that was allotted to military officials. He demanded an end of eviction and asked the participants to show their full solidarity with Kot Addo tenants.

I spoke about the present land rights campaign and told that this is the third large gathering of peasants during the last two months. There will be another such event in Lahore on 29 March and then a historic peasant conference in Okara military Farms on 17 and 18 April 2009. I said there is

no other option but to accept our demand of land rights. "If we can fight for the lawyers and can go to jail several times, imagine what can we do for our own demands, we are all ready for sacrifices and this land belongs to us and will remain so". I demanded from chief justice Iftikhar Choudry to take a sue motto notice of this situation and order an investigation of all the killings of Mozareen at the hands of the military generals during Musharaf period.

Mehr Abdul Sattar general secretary AMP spoke passionately about the sacrifices that Mozareen have made for this movement. "We have fought shoulder to shoulder with lawyers to fight for an independent judiciary, it is their turn to support our just cause". Mehr Abdul Sattar appealed to civil society to come forward to help the peasants.

Later a large rally went to Okara Depal Pur Chouck with their red flags and blocked the main road for some time.

This was one of the largest gathering of the peasants in this area. Literary all the inhabitants of all 14 villages of Kalaya Estate attended this peasant convention. It attracted the main stream media to this remote area.

Daily *Dawn* Lahore reported on 27 march that thousands of peasants participated in the convention.

A new mass meeting of peasants in Lahore Benghali Military Farms

Dear all,

Another mass meeting of peasants was organised in Lahore Benghali Military Farms today on 29 March at Jallo Park. Over 700 attended the peasant convention organised by Anjman Mozareen Punjab. This was the largest meeting of peasants in the area for years.

They demanded the ownership of the land they are cultivating for over 100 years. At present, the land is occupied by the Military Farms administration.

The peasants came to the convention raising red flags and slogans for ownership. They came on their tractor and trolies. The convention was addressed by the leaders of AMP, some of them came from other districts. Also Labour Party Pakistan leaders spoke and expressed their solidarity and total support for the ownership campaign.

Mehr Abdul Sattar, general secretary AMP, Nadeem Ashraf of Renalkhurd, Shabir Choudry of Depalpur AMP, Abdul Ghafar of Kulyana Military Estate, Mian Ashraf and Mohammed Hanif of AMP Lahore and several other peasant leaders addressed the gathering and declared that the campaign will continue till it meet the success and peasants become the ownership of the land.

Labour Party Pakistan women secretary Nazli Javed, Maqsood Mujahid member LPP EC and myself spoke at the gathering and expressed their total support for the campaign.

This was the fourth large gathering of peasants during the last two months. Earlier such peasant conventions were held at Renalkhurd, Depal Pur and Kulyana Estate where over 10000 have already participated. They are demanding from PPP government to fulfill their promise of granting land ownership rights. Benazir Bhutto promised the peasants in writting that PPP will hand over this

state land to the peasants when it will come to power.

Over 68000 acres of land in different districts of Punjab is been occupied by Military Farms administration. The land is been main cultivated by tenants who had been promised by successive governments to give this land to them but failed to implement it.

AMP was the first peasant organisation to offer resistance to Musharaf dictatorship when they tried to evacuate them by deception. The AMP launched a movement unprecedented in Pakistan history during 2002, 2003. This led to the arrests, false cases, killings and injuring of many during the resistance. The women played an important role.

The AMP has decided to relaunch the movement of land ownership.

On 17-18 April 2009, a two days peasant conference will take place in Okara Military Farms. It is expected that over 20,000 will attend the mass rally on 17 April.

Today, I warned the Zardari government of another long march by workers and peasants if the demand for land ownership is not accepted till the end of April this year. I also asked the chief justice to take a sue motto notice of the situation.

We demanded from Nawaz Sharif that the land belong to Punjab government and it must decide for land ownership of the tenants.

A revolutionary wave is erupting among the Mozareen of Punjab at present. It will lead to another round of mass resistance to the present government on a class issue this time,
