

Bangladesh: Landless men and women march in Bhola District in observance of 17 April, International Day of Peasants' Struggle 2019

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On 10 April 2019 at 10 am a big rally of landless men and women was called by Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS) in observance of the International Peasant Struggle Day-2019 in the street of Charfasion (Bhola District).



Rally that marched the street of Charfasion sub-district

The rally started from Town Hall and culminated in front of Freedom Fighter Memorial with the speech of Badrul Alam, President of Bangladesh Krishok Federation. The demands include right of poor landless to *Khasland* [1], water bodies and natural resources.

The rally was addressed, among others, by freedom fighter and Bangladesh Krishok Federation Charfasion Upozila President Mollah Abul Kalam Azad. Bangladesh Krishok Federation President General Secretary Zayed Iqbal Khan. Mahbubur Raham sang popular song impressing the audience. In his speech Bangladesh Kirhsok Federation President Badrul Alam demanded to the government to implement the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in the Rural Areas. He also called up on the government to take a proper action in order to hold a genuine and integrated agrarian reform in the country under which identified 5000000 acres of *Khasland* should be distributed among the fona-fide landless men and women. He told the participants that the declaration would be translated into Bengali and disseminate among them as soon as possible. A leaf-let has been distributed among the people depicting the perspective of the Day 17 April and its implication in the peasants struggle. Leaf-let is below:

Call of the International Peasants struggle Day 2019

Background

In 1996, in the City of Eldorado, Brazil, one million peasants gathered in an assembly and marched rally demanding land reform. The police shot at the rally to curb the movement and 19 peasants were killed and 200 peasants were wounded. To commemorate this day, on April 17 every year, 'International Peasants struggle day' is observed for strengthening solidarity among the peasants of the globe. In this year, we have taken the initiative to celebrate this day as weeklong celebrations.

The reality of Bangladesh in 1996

On the same year, peasant of Bangladesh experienced oppression and torture. As one of the signatory country of General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT), Bangladesh became the member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the subsidy from the agriculture was withdrawn abruptly and consequently the whole peasant society encountered extreme uncertainty. On the same year, peasants created a movement demanding the fertilizer and 17 peasants in different parts of the country were killed as police shot on the protestor peasants.

Despite the frequent oppression and repression against the peasants to curve this peasant's movement, the movements continued and it rather acted as a catalyst to transform the state power. The transformation of power, in reality, did not change the state of the peasants and it remained the same. Landless women and men living in Galachipa of Patuakhali district have been subjected to assault of land brokers and traditional muscleman, including torching houses. 506 houses were burnt, together with missing 16 children, Narayan Chandra, a person with visual impairment and one of the leaders of the landless movement from Krishok Federation was burnt inside the house. It is assumed that the missing children were thrown into the nearby river. This tragic incident was published in the national dailies with special attention.

Land reforms and Khas land movement in Bangladesh

After independence, new discussion on land reform began. In the 1980s, after long negotiation of the representatives of the peasant organizations with government, a 'Land Reforms Committee' in terms of proper allocation of Khas land was formed. But this committee never came into effect. Apart from issuing some notification and advertisement, there was no such progress in land reforms. Eventually, under the intense movement of peasant organizations, the government formed the "Land Administration's Manual'87" in the year 1987 to focus the interest of the landless people in true sense. New horizons were exposed in landless peasant movement by promulgating the land administration policy. Based on this policy, peasants and landless movement organizations raised their demand for allocation and settlement of *Khasland* to the genuine landless people.

By the basis of this policy, the landless people across the country get organized to establish their land rights on *Khasland*. Through joint efforts of Bangladesh Krishok (Peasant) Federation and Kishani Sabha (Female peasant organization) was able to establish their land rights in different areas of the country in the south, south-western and northern parts particularly in Bhola, Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Satkhira Dinajpur and Kurigram district. Thus landless people established their land rights in 76000 acres of *Khasland* and water bodies.

Land Grabbing

The importance of land emerged since the beginning of the agricultural civilization. The land is the only permanent asset in the globe. So human beings have their rights on land as a birthright. Human beings are deprived of these rights on account of the social system. At the present age, the importance of land is immense; it is proved that land is the main source of livelihood for the people. But domestic and multinational companies are grabbing land by devising different tactics. As a result, marginalized communities are becoming landless. In this aspect, the food sovereignty like food security of the marginalized communities is under serious threat.

Human Rights of Peasants

Despite the occupation of domestic and multinational companies, peasants/small scale food producers provide 80% basic food to the world. United Nations General Assembly, 2018 passed the UN declaration for the protection of the rights of the people and peasant related to the peasantry and the rural society. Bangladesh is one of the signatory countries of this charter. On the basis of

this declaration, Bangladesh government should declare agriculture as a dignified profession and take measures to protect human rights.

All necessary measures should be taken to preserve the rights of women, especially peasant women's control over local seeds and agricultural system. On the one hand, the multinational companies are destroying local seeds by introducing genetically modified organism (GMO) and on the other hand they are curtailing the control of the peasants on local seeds. To prevent the evil spirits of the multinational companies, it is very important to initiate ecology and environment-friendly sustainable agriculture farming.

Our demands

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the peasants and Other People working in the Rural Areas should be implemented.
- The government should take initiative for settlement of Khas land and water bodies to the genuine landless and fisherfolk.
- All illegal occupiers and land grabbers should be evicted from the Khas land and should be allocated among landless people.
- All types of measures should be taken to implement the act for protecting agricultural land.
- Peasants' control on the seeds should be established.
- Women's ownership in the land should be ensured.
- Ecology and environment-friendly farming technology should be initiated.
- Two-thirds of the produced crop should be provided to sharecropper.

Footnotes

[1] *Khasland* means government owned fallow land, where nobody has property rights. It is land which is deemed to be owned by government and available for allocation according to government priorities.