

PRESS NOTE

# India: Two-Day National Consultation on Land and Forest Rights Movements Conclude

Wednesday 3 July 2019, by [Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2019).

- **All India protest action and assertion of forests rights by movements on July 22<sup>nd</sup>**
- **Government should withdraw the Forest Amendment Act and effectively implement Forest Rights Act**
- **A joint protest by forests and land rights movements at Sansad marg, New Delhi on 28<sup>th</sup> November.**

## Contents

- [Major points emerging from the](#)
  - [Proposed future programs \(...\)](#)
- 

**New Delhi, 2 July 2019** : Two-Day national consultation of Land and Forest Rights Movements organised by Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan concluded at the Assam Association in Delhi. The conference witnessed the participation of more than 200 representatives of the community organisations from 12 states of the country.

The movements working on the forest and land Rights and for implementation of FRA declared that millions of Adivasis and other traditional forest dwelling communities are facing the danger of eviction due to the Supreme Court rules on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2019. The order says that if the claims of the tribal people under the FRA are rejected, then the State should evict them from the forests. The lawyers of the Union government were absent when the matter came up for hearing and woke up from its deep slumber only after a lot of agitation. Then after the Supreme Court amended its ruling and stayed it til 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2019. It is still unclear that how evictions can be justified on the basis of rejection of claims. Since we know that no community can be legally evicted from its “independent habitat” and definitely not from any other area without their free and informed consent. It is also worth mentioning that there is no provision of rejection in the Forest Rights Act.

The meeting noted that Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Acts, 2006, also known as Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) is the first important forest law which recognizes the historical injustice incurred upon the forest-dependent communities and scheduled tribes. The grassroots endeavours, pan-India struggles of the forest-dependent communities and others paved the way for this historical law which accommodated the rights of the Adivasis and other traditional forest-dwellers in the ambit of the laws for the citizens of the country. Most of the people classified as Forest-dwellers in India belong to the Schedules Tribes (ST), non-

notified Adivasis, Dalits and vulnerable poor communities who are occupationally dependent on sustainable agriculture, cattle rearing, fisheries and collection of other forest-produce and therefore, rely on land and forest for their livelihood. Women have been ensured equal rights in the FRA. Along with this reality, many forest-dwelling communities in India believe that those forests are better preserved where the communities are closely connected to the forests by means of their traditional custom. The states however continue to displace people which affects the biodiversity and has taken away their livelihoods.

It also agreed that there is a lack of political will amongst governments when it comes to the implementation of the FRA. Most of the parties made promises in its manifesto to protect the rights of the forest-dwellers under the guarantee of Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Acts, 2006. However, until today few communities have been given their due rights and are still facing eviction, threats and violence and are regularly terrorized by the forest department and the feudal powers. It only says the anti adivasi and anti forest community character of the governments.

The movements working on the Forest Rights Act and its implementation strongly believe that it is very important to comprehensively evaluate the situation in order to address the relevant issues and formulate and understand an adequate strategy. The government is constantly emphasizing on the new amendments under the Forests Act of India. At this juncture, it is not possible to work in seclusion and it is imperative for all the struggles to come together. To that effect a coordination committee was formed for coordination action all over the country.

### **Major points emerging from the Two-Day National Consultation**

The two-day national consultation was organized in the backdrop of the Supreme Court ruling that came in February which posed a danger of destruction of immediate eviction of tribes and complete annulment of the Forest Rights Act. Meanwhile, the proposed amendment of Indian Forests Act, 1927 has strengthened these efforts and the attempts to capture the forests and the forests dwellers by the forest department have escalated, again.

This is the immediate context of the discourse but the fact which largely emerged was that the Indian ruling class is totally in the fists of national and the international capital, and whose gigantic might was on display in just concluded General Elections.

In the coming days, the corporate attacks on water, forests and land are going to become even more frequent. The slogan of 'Land to the tillers' has now changed to 'Land to the corporations'. The whole focus of the government is on robbing off the wealth from the hands of the capitalists and transferring it to the capitalists. The industrial corridors, Sagarmala, Bharatmala, Bullet Train, Smart Cities, large ports, expressways, and highways are some examples where all the measures have been adopted to transfer their whole profit to the capitalist class. A major challenge before the people's struggles today is the absence of a strong opposition in the parliament. It is the need of the hour that we go beyond agitating on streets and the politics of demands and focus on generating a collective public awareness which can stand against the burgeoning Fascism and capitalism. Today we are confronted with the challenge to protest the democracy and fight against confusion, fear and hunger- and the people's movements have to be ready to fight this.

The main points and proposals emerging from the discussions are as follows:

The House rejects the proposed amendments to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and demands that the Forest Rights Act be enforced effectively. The movements have demanded for years that Forest Act,

1927 should be changed and therefore, the organizations present in the House will prepare a new draft for this law.

The government has understood that the Gram Sabha is the strongest weapon in the hands of the community in this country and thus, it is trying its best to take its powers away in a strategic manner by means of amendments and ordinances. We should prepare to strengthen Gram Sabha. This need was clearly demonstrated in the struggle against Adani in Bastar.

Today, the largest threat to the Adivasis dwelling in the forests of the country is from the state violence because the people fighting for their rights under FRA from Kerala to Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and many other states are being arrested in the name of being Maoists and are being tortured. The House saluted the struggle of the comrades locked in jails and condemned the government oppressions.

The claims made under the Forest Rights Act were rejected by various ways in a planned manner. At some places, the act was not accepted at all and even today billions of Adivasis and forest dweller families are landless and wealth-less.

There is a situation of confusion created due to separate parallel processes of land and forests rights settlements by the government since 1996. More clarity is required from the government and the Courts regarding this.

### **Proposed future programs and plans:**

1. Programmes and protest actions condemning the government actions, forest act amendments will be organized on 22<sup>nd</sup> July at the village, block, district and state level.
2. The chief ministers of the country will be appealed in person or by letter to present the case in favour of the Forest Rights Act and the Adivasis in the Supreme Court.
3. It was also decided to intervene collectively in the ongoing case in the Supreme Court.
4. It was also agreed that movements will intensify their solidarity to ongoing struggles on the ground and facilitate exchange and learning from each others struggle.
5. Reach out to the progressive and SC/ST MPs of the ruling party and the opposition to inform them of FRA and other laws and our approach to the issue.
6. A committee was also formed to monitor the new measures, tactics employed, changes in the laws and other issues regarding the loot of the resources and then disseminate this information to the grassroots movements in simple language.
7. A massive demonstration jointly organised by land and forest rights movements in Delhi would be organised on Sansad Marg, Delhi on 28<sup>th</sup> November.

The representatives from All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP), National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), Adivasi Adhikar Manch, Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha (Canning Lane), Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Mahasabha, Shoshit Jan Andolan, Sarvhara Jan Andolan, Bharat Jan Andolan, Jindabad Sangathan, Kashtakari Sangathan, Adivasi Aikya Vedike (Kerala), Lok Mukti Sangathan, Sarv Adivasi Sangathan, Dantewada, Tribal Foundation of Chhattisgarh, Baigam Tribal Development, Wardha, Gond Mahasabha Chhattisgarh, Bundelkhand Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Saharaiya Jan Adhikar Manch, Delhi Solidarity Group, Himdhara, Patha Dalit Adhikar

Manch attended the conference.

*Regards*

Comrade Jitendra Chaudhary (Adivasi Adhikar Manch), Comrade Hannan Mollah Prem Singh (Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan), Roma, Ashok Chaudhary (All India Union of Forestry Working People), Madhuresh K Umar (National Alliance of People's Movements) Shweta, Sanjeev Kumar, Anil Verghese (Delhi Solidarity Group)

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