

World People in Solidarity with the protesting Indian Farmers

[Joint Statement of Concerned farmers, activists and citizens of the World published in the form of an Advertisement in THE NEW YORK TIMES, USA on February 16, 2021]

Nearly one million farmers are peacefully organizing and demonstrating but the Indian government has responded with state-sanctioned violence, including the use of tear gas, water cannons, mass arrests and indefinite detention. These human rights abuses must end now.

Indian farmers are standing up to defend their dignity and livelihoods. They are protesting three new laws passed hastily without due deliberation, that will deregulate agriculture in India. For many, this is a matter of life and death. These laws benefit large conglomerate corporate entities and remove protections for farmers. Nearly half of India's workforce is in the agricultural sector, the majority on small-hold farms. Millions of families now stand to lose their farms. An increase in industrial farming could have a devastating impact on the food we consume and the future of our environment.

Farmers across India have peacefully organized and protested for months. Yet they have faced violence, persecution, and retaliation by the government. The protest sites, at times, have been cut off from water, aid, and electricity. Internet services have been strategically suspended to silence dissent. Media outlets have been censored and threatened. Protestors, activists, and journalists have been arrested, assaulted, and held in indefinite detention.

India's actions run counter to core sacred values shared by all democracies: the protection of civic and political participation and the commitment to human rights. We are living in a dangerous time when global citizens must be called on to safeguard the principles on which all democratic nations are founded.

To Indian farmers: You have ignited one of the largest protests in human history. From the fields of Punjab, to the villages of Kerala, to the streets of New Delhi, your voices echo around the world. Now we raise our voices in solidarity.

We call on all people who champion human rights-in the United States and around the world-to join us and condemn the abuses against farmers, laborers, and protesters in India. Use your voice to call on India to respect the core principles of democracy, including the rights of all people to protest peacefully, demand accountability, and envision a safer, healthier, and more just future for all people on the planet.

HISTORIC RELEVANCE OF "PAGDI SAMBHAL" PROTEST

In 2020, more than a century after the historic Pagdi Sambhal Jatta farmer's movement spearheaded by Ajit Singh in 1907 (Ajit Singh was the uncle of Shaheed Bhagat Singh) before Partition, the Central government enacted three 'anti-farmer' laws. The peasant organizations have resurrected it as an icon and a powerful inspiration to the present farmer's agitation on Delhi's borders and all over India.

The British colonial government brought in three anti- farmer laws in Punjab in 1906. They are: the Punjab Land Colonization Bill, which introduced inheritance by primogeniture, that take away the farmer's land, as they are fearing now; the Bari Doab Canal Act, by which rates of irrigation water increased, and 25 per cent hike in revenue rates was effected; and the Punjab Land Alienation Act.

Between March and May 1907, several meetings were held in various cities of Punjab to oppose the three laws. On March 22, 1907, during a meeting held at Lyallpur, Lala Banke Dayal, editor, Jhang Syal, recited his Pagdi Sambhal Jatta, now regarded as a classic. Subsequently, the peasantry's agitation was called as the Pagdi Sambhal Jatta movement. Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India, told British Parliament that in all, meetings held in Punjab, of which Ajit Singh had addressed 19 as the main speaker. Ajit Singh was a powerful orator who used to hold the audience spellbound. The British Officials described one of his speeches, delivered on April 21 in Rawalpindi, as 'highly seditious' and a case under Section 124 A (sec of the IPC was registered against him. Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-chief of the British forces in India, apprehended a revolt in the armed forces. Ultimately, the three laws were revoked in May 1907, but Lala Lajpat also a speaker at some of these meetings, was arrested on May 9 and Ajit Singh on June 2. Both were detained in the Mandalay prison in Burma for six months under Regulation-III of 1818. Both were released on November, 11th.

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