



# Trade Union Declaration on Women in Tea Plantations

(adopted at the seminar “Strategies for Empowering Women Workers”

December 14-15, 2008

Birpada, Jalpaigudi, West Bengal)

Recognising that tea is among the few industries in which women constitute more than half of the workforce in the tea industry;

Recognising that women are engaged in skilled employment and that they are the main and regular workforce in tea industry;

Recalling that women in tea plantations combine productive and reproductive work, the value of which is never recognised;

Realising that the organisation of production in tea plantations systematically disempowers women and that their economic contribution remains relatively unrecognised;

Recalling that in tea gardens women do not get equal wages for equal work;

Recalling that health care for women workers in tea gardens are nominal or negligible;

Recalling that women are the first and worst to hit in times of crisis as in the cases of the spate of closures and abandonment that has hit the tea gardens across the country, in the last decade;

Affirming that trade unions in the tea plantations contribute to the well-being of workers in the tea gardens; yet

Recalling that women are rarely in the leadership positions of worker organisations and that they are generally not part of collective bargaining processes;

Women workers from different parts of India assembled in Birpada, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal on December 15, 2008, the International Tea Day declare that

The tea industry should recognise the contribution of women workers to the economy and reorganise the industry in such a way to recognise primacy of women in tea industry;

The tea industry should stop the practice of discrimination in wages of women workers;

The tea industry and the government should recognise the productive and reproductive functions of women in tea gardens and ensure the protection of health rights of women and children;

*Women who are the majority workers in the tea industry deserve more representation, space in leadership and basic rights such as equal wage, housing, health, education and freedom from exploitation in any form;*

*Women aspire to be in trade union leadership and call upon the trade union leadership to continue to take proactive steps to assimilate women in leadership positions and ensure their representation in collective bargaining and negotiations;*

The tea industry and the government should take proactive steps to ensure that women are not subjected to bear

extreme burden in times of crisis as in the cases of the spate of closures and abandonment that has hit the tea gardens across the country, in the last decade; and that gender specific consequences of closures and abandonment in Tea Gardens are addressed;

Trade unions and workers' organisers and activists will take a lead and be proactive in awareness generation on the role of women in tea plantations and encourage them to raise their voice against any form of exploitation and demand their rights;

Key constituents of the tea industry will promote a gender specific affirmative action like proportionate representation of women in union leadership, participation in collective bargaining, mechanism to address sexual harassment, women's health etc;

Date: December 15, 2008

Place: Birpada