



Trade Union Declaration on Housing and Land Rights in Tea Plantations and Empowerment of Women Tea Workers

On the Fifth International Tea Day (ITD) on December 15, 2009, assemblies of Tea workers in Alipur Dwar, West Bengal, Vandiperiyar, Kerala and Valparai, Tamilnadu issue the following declaration on the “Housing and Land Rights of Tea Plantation Workers”.

Considering that about 1.2 million workers who have inhabited tea plantations for generations and contributed to its economy have been denied rights over their homestead land. By forcing them to reside inside the plantations, planters have been able to control their work, work schedules and monitor their lives;

Considering that in tea plantations, ‘housing’ becomes an instrument of control rather than entitlement;

Considering that tea workers are mostly *adivasis* and *dalits* who were brought to the plantations as indentured labourers during the colonial period and have been kept along with families in a state of virtual bondage for decades by the tea planters;

Considering that even the basic needs of water, sanitation, electricity and other civic amenities are denied or are not sufficiently provided to the workers. Moreover, privatisation of housing and other civic amenities has contributed to severe human rights violations in those gardens, which were closed or abandoned by planters in recent years;

Considering that tea gardens located in remote areas give no opportunity to workers to access any other livelihood options;

Considering that in the absence of alternatives, three to four generations of family as well as workers and non-workers occupy the same tiny living spaces in tea gardens;

Considering that housing is accounted as part of the wage and planters have used this as an argument to keep tea workers’ wage depressed;

Considering that neither the Plantation Labour Act 1951 or the Tea Act, 1953 confer the right to housing and land to the tea workers;

Considering that ‘labour lines’ in tea plantations violates the principles of equitable, adequate and sustainable housing rights as enunciated in the Istanbul Declaration and Habitat agenda;

Considering that tea estates are exempted from land reform regulations and were allowed to retain huge tracks of land as ‘khet’ lands and forest lands;

Recognising that it is the primary responsibility of the state to give the tea plantation workers housing and land rights;

Realising that the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 gives right to housing and land rights to advasis in India;

Recognising that while tea gardens are both lease and ownership, out of the land given to plantations, even today about 40%-50% of the land in plantations is vacant/unused. Further, planters encroach and use the adjacent government land and use it for tea production and allied activities;

Recognising that so far tea workers have been denied benefits of government schemes and credit facilities due to the absence of housing rights;

Recognising that the tea workers should not be subjected to uncertainties arising out of the private ownership of tea gardens;

Recognising that housing and land rights give identity;

Recognising that housing and land rights ensure citizenship rights and guarantee civil and political participation;

Recognising that women are the main workers in tea gardens and hence should get the land *patta* in their name;

Recognising that in the case of closed or abandoned tea gardens housing and land rights become particularly important;

We, the trade unions call for:

- Immediate recognition of housing and land rights for tea workers
- Transfer of land *patta* to women workers who are the main workers in tea plantations

No More Labour Lines

Land for All...House for All
