

JAN SATYAGRAHA



March for Justice

October 25th, 2012 | Victory for the marchers !

2012



In this issue

- Victory for the marchers !
- We stay mobilised !
- The ten points of the agreement



VICTORY FOR THE MARCHERS !

October 11th. After eight days of march under a burning sun, and nights on the road, the thousands of Satyagrahis (marchers of the Jan Satyagraha) assembled at the COD Ground at Agra, the city well-known because of the Taj Mahal. The march planned this day has been replaced by a great public meeting, as the negotiations with the government seemed to have progressed reaching an agreement on giving landless people land. After a musical introduction by Ekta Kala Manch, the cultural wing of Ekta Parishad, Ramesh Sharma, a senior negotiator on the Jan Satyagraha team addressed the crowd, referring to the 11th October 2012 “as a historical day in a historical city”. Indeed after the negotiations between the government and Jan Satyagraha restarted few days ago, an agreement was reached on a 10-point “road map”. After speeches given by different Gandhian leaders, the Minister of Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh arrived at the COD Ground. In front of the marchers, he and P.V. Rajagopal, the leader of Jan Satyagraha, signed the agreement. As Amitabh Behar, a senior social policy analyst read the document aloud to the crowd, it became clear that it was a road-map toward achieving a major land reform policy and agenda in favour of the poor and landless rural people. (Imagine how proud people felt with the Minister of the Central Government coming and acceding to their demands!) Copies were handed out to all the marchers for their review and study.

Then, P.V. Rajagopal recounted the struggle that had begun with the first large march, Janadesh five years before. He talked about his experiences during his past year’s Samwad Yatra, in which he had toured the country and experienced first-hand the appalling realities of the life of so many marginalized people in India. He called them “invisible groups”, many of them with no access to any rights, as they have no papers to identify themselves and thus have no claims. Asked from where the power of the struggle comes from, he noted that it was the power of the poor that had transformed their weaknesses into strengths. What happened today, he added, should happen in the whole country, a struggle without violence leading to victory. He cautioned, however, that if the milestones of the road map are not achieved within six months, the government could be sure to



expect 100,000 marchers to complete the Jan Satyagraha leg of the journey from Agra to Delhi.

In his speech, the Minister of Rural Development, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, made a personal commitment to do whatever was possible within his power to pursue land reforms. He encouraged the organisations of civil society to continue to put pressure on government, especially on state governments as they have the responsibility of carrying out land distribution, and to ensure a proper implementation of many of the recommendations in the agreement. He suggested that if indeed the ten point agenda was not followed, and expected progress in six months were not to happen, the Jan Satyagrahis would be fully justified to march again.

While some of the marchers celebrated the victory through songs and dances, some started to join the railway station, to undertake the long travel back to their villages, a copy of the agreement in their hand.

WE STAY MOBILISED !

The agreement signed on October 11th is a great step towards social justice for the poor and marginalised communities of India. Nevertheless, we will continue to be vigilant in ensuring that there is effective implementation of the new laws and mechanisms. Ekta Parishad and other organisations that form part of the Jan Satyagraha ought to stay mobilised and be ready to act again. In six months, if the draft of the land reform is not presented, the marchers will complete the initial route of Jan Satyagraha, and walk from Agra to Delhi.

In the meantime, it is important to maintain the pressure on the government to encourage it to take action.

Sign the petition on Avaaz : <http://en.avaaz.org/948/indias-poorest-win-battle-for-land-rights>



Nicholas Barla, member of the National Council of Ekta Parishad and Adivasi leader of Orissa, continues its visit in Europe. He already took part in several support actions to Jan Satyagraha, participated in the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg, met with groups of supporters, French politicians and media. On October 25th, Nicholas will be in Saint-Lô (France) and the days after in Belgium. For information, please contact Marie Bohner at: marie@organisehumanevents.com

THE TEN POINTS OF THE AGREEMENT

On October 11th, 2012, in Agra, the Ministry of Rural Development and Jan Satyagraha signed a ten-points agreement on land reforms. Here is a short explanation of these 10 points (you can read the agreement on our website [here](#))

1. National Land Reforms Policy. In India, land is a prerogative of each state, and in consequence, land reform is a state subject. Nonetheless the Ministry of Rural Development agreed with the idea that a National Land Reforms Policy announced by the central government could have its own importance, and the Ministry will put out a draft of this policy and initiate a dialogue with states within the next 4-6 months. Civil society organisations, including Jan Satyagraha, will be actively involved in this process.



2. Statutory backing to the provision of agricultural land and homestead land. The Ministry of Rural Development will initiate a dialogue with states on the issue of giving statutory backing to :

- Provision of agricultural land to the landless poor in backwards districts
- Provision of homestead land to the homeless people in rural areas (at least 4 ares)

3. Homestead land. At the moment, the financial assistance provided to homeless families for shelter, through the programme called “Indira Awas Yojana” is not sufficient to achieve its goal. The Ministry of Rural Development will propose doubling the budget granted per unit for providing homestead land to homeless families.

4. Enhanced land access and land rights for the poor, marginalized and deprived landless. Several laws are meant to protect land rights and access to land to poor and marginalised communities of India, but they are not implemented properly. The Ministry of Rural Development will issue advisories in the next two months to exhort States to implement effectively these enacted laws.

5. Fast track land tribunals. Numerous people can't access or use their land because a case is pending in a court. It often takes several years to get the case solved. The Ministry of Rural Development will initiate dialogue with States to establish Fast Track Land Tribunals for speedy disposal of the cases pending in courts. It will also exhort States to extend legal aid to persons, especially dalits and adivasis, whose land are involved in litigation.

6. Effective implementation of Panchayats (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA). PESA is an Act giving power of decision on land issues to the Gram Sabhas (village assembly) in tribal areas. The Ministry of Rural Development, along with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Panchayati Raj, will work on issuing detailed circulars to States to ensure effective implementation of PESA.

7. Effective implementation of Forest Rights Act (FRA). The FRA is an Act enabling tribes and other forest dwellers to obtain land titles and use rights to minor forest products. A recent survey showed that the FRA is not properly implemented. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs issued a set of revised rules on September 13th under the FRA, and now States will be actively exhorted and supported to implement it effectively.

8. Forest and Revenue boundary disputes. In India, public land can be under the control of the Forest Department or the Revenue Department. Large scales of land are claimed by both departments, and this situation is putting people who are asking for land titles in great difficulties as it is not clear which department's legislations are applicable to the land. The Ministry of Rural Development will issue an advisory to States to resolve disputes between Forest and Revenue Departments.

9. Survey, updating of records and governing common property resources. The Ministry of Rural Development will exhort and support the States to carry out survey of the Common Property Resources (CPRs).

10. Task force on land reforms. The Ministry of Rural Development will immediately set up a Task Force on Land Reforms headed by the Union Minister of Rural Development to implement the above agenda. Members of the Task Force will include representatives of the Ministry, state governments, civil society organisations working on land reform issues and all stakeholders concerned. The first meeting of the task force is on October 17th, 2012.

Next month in the newsletter, find the detailed story of this long struggle, in India and in the world !

In the meantime, you'll find information on our websites :

www.ektaparishad.com, www.jansatyagraha.org, www.ektaeurope.org and on facebook : [Jan Satyagraha 2012](#)