



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013 - A NEW ERA BEGINS

# Ekta Parishad Newsletter



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## Dear Friends, Activists and Supporters of Ekta Parishad

2012 witnessed one of the biggest non-violent marches in the Indian history, and a New Year has come. Eventhough late, from Ekta Parishad we wish you all a pleasant, healthy and happy 2013! May the big successes of Jan Satyagraha, and the hope and passion, which it generated - based on the solidarity and the sacrifice that all of you brought from across the world - continue to impact on the poor and marginalized in attaining their land rights.

### Restructuring the Movement

The turn of the year will also bring a new era for Ekta Parishad. During the last three years we put all our efforts together to make the Jan Satyagraha happen. We focussed on the national government and the capital of Delhi to bring attention to policy makers and the media the problems at the grassroots. Now it is time to go back to different regions and to

the villages, to the fields, and to bring the power back to the grassroots and again retrench by building up community leadership to carry out local actions.

To make this return happen, a lot of different meetings have been held through the last three months. For Ekta Parishad, the goal of this meetings was to think about and discuss the question how we can succeed in the task above and to strengthen Ekta Parishad's unique capability which is to mobilize at the grassroots and dialogue at different levels of governments. With this newsletter you're invited to join this reflection - and then let's start to act again! Because, as Rajagopal P.V. puts it: «Announcing a set of recommendations is one thing, but changing one's behaviour is something else.»

### New Rules for Home-Assistance

One of the successes of the last two weeks is the Union Cabinet, Government of India,

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approved the Ministry of Rural Developments to raise the unit cost under Indira Yawas Yojana (IAY) and in that process has legitimized the need for shelter land, a contribution made by Ekta Parishad (<http://iay.nic.in/netiay/home.aspx>).

According to the approved cost, in plain areas, unit assistance under the scheme has been raised from Rs 45,000 to Rs 70,000 and from Rs 48,500 to Rs 75,000 in hilly and difficult areas in the 12th Five Year Plan. The enhancement of unit assistance for homestead site to rural below poverty line (BPL) households who have neither agricultural land nor a house site is a response to Point 3 of the National Land Reform Agreement decided on October 11th, which was signed by the leader of the Jan Satyagraha, Rajagopal and the Indian Minister for Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh. Ekta Parishad will do everything possible to provide the same level of response to the other nine points of the agreement. Jai Jagat!

## Ekta Europe Meeting, December 2nd-3rd 2012, Brussels, Belgium

About twenty people from different organisations joined the Ekta Europe Meeting in Brussels at the beginning of December, which was organized by Ekta Belgium. Among the participating groups were activists and members of Ekta Europe and Ekta Parishad India, the German «Freunde von Ekta Parishad», of the Action Village India (AVI), the Swiss CESCO Foundation, of french groups including Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-violente (MAN), Solidarité, Peuple Solidaires and Le Paix en Marche, Gandhi International and of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN). Ekta Europe thanks everybody for their presence at the meeting and their numerous solidarity actions carried out in 2012. The sharing of ideas, actions and good company among the different groups over the whole year was a lively interaction.

### Review of Jan Satyagraha

As a main topic of the meeting, Jill Carr-Harris and Rajagopal provided both a review and an outlook for the ongoing process of the Jan Satyagraha 2012 and the development of the Global Movement, which has been renamed as the International Initiatives (I-I). Rajagopal underlined the huge importance of the march for the redevelopment not only of Ekta Parishad

but of all social movements in India. The march with its 60,000 participants was a tremendous sign for a new hope on political change by non-violent actions in India, especially in the context of the various Indian Social Movements (against corruption, etc) that had arisen.

The Samwad Yatra which has taken place as a year long travel through India by Rajagopal and other Ekta-Members as a preparation campaign for the Jan Satyagraha, said Rajagopal, helped to negotiate with the Indian government. At the same time, this helped to unite around 800 land-related struggles on the ground and brought the messages of the Jan Satyagraha process to the villages all over India. Since 40% of the Jan Satyagraha marchers were women, both the march and the Samwad Yatra highlighted also the struggles of poor women and children on land, which will become a special focus in the work of Ekta Parishad in the coming years.

### Election Campaign 2014

Now the campaign for the general elections in India in 2014 will start in late 2013. As Rajagopal pointed out, the Jan Satyagraha was and is also a tool for Ekta Parishad and other organisations to bring up the land reform agenda in the election campaign. The Congress party (and UPA) are likely to emphasize the right to homestead land while CPM is calling attention to the second round of land reforms. The BJP (NDA) are also likely to include this in their party manifestos.

## Task-Force Update

In the context of the Task-Force of the representatives of the Indian government and the Jan Satyagraha which works currently on a draft for a new Indian land law as a follow up on the agreement of 11<sup>th</sup> of October between the Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh and the Jan Satyagraha, several activities have taken place during the last three month: A series of meetings with land rights movements have been organized in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Bhopal (Madya Pradesh), Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Bhubaneswar (Orissa), Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) and Ludhiana (Punjab) for outlining the key issues on which the central government of India has to send detailed directives and advisories to concerned states. The drafts, which were developed in this meetings were later on discussed with Task Force Members and finally submitted to the Central Ministry for Rural Development. The draft of the advisories and directives addressing the state governments have later been presented in a Task Force meeting. This working process should guarantee a certain connectivity between the grassroots level and the top level of the central administration. In addition to this process a meeting of lawyers and other land rights experts was organized in National Advisory Council at the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. Their specific inputs to land tribunals, fast track courts and on a new legislation on homestead and agricultural land distribution had been taken and considered in discussions inside the Task Force. The last meeting of the Task Force has been held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November. The Task-Force members discussed there the National Land Reform Agreement between Jan Satyagraha and the Government. The reviews of each subgroup covering individual agenda items of the Agenda had been discussed. All the subgroups are supposed to submit their drafts on a new land law in the next few weeks.





## European Journey of Rajagopal P.V. and Jill Carr-Harris, December 1<sup>st</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 2012.

The President of Ekta Parishad Rajagopal P.V. and the representative of Ekta Parishad inside the International Initiatives, Jill Carr-Harris went on a very informative trip through Europe in December. They met activists and representatives of several organizations related to non-violent social activism, land law issues and environmental struggles and other people interested in this topics in Brussels, Cologne, Zurich, Geneva, Angers (France) and Paris. Rajagopal and Carr-Harris brought three main outcomes of this trip back to India: First, the University in Brussels suggested to put together a

curriculum on non-violence studies.

Secondly, both of them were impressed by the number of land struggles people are facing in Belgium, Germany and France: In Belgium there is a struggle against the cultivation of genetically modified potatoes going on. Another are the milk producers in Brussels that are fighting against declining milk prices regulated through the EU. This milk producers are using non-violent techniques learned during the Janadesh march in 2007. In Kerpen near Cologne in Germany, a protest camp was established in April 2012 by activists of the german campagne «ausgeco2hlt» ([www.ausgeco2hlt.de](http://www.ausgeco2hlt.de)) in a forest which is threatened by a lignate mining project by the german energy multi RWE. It was cleared by police forces at the end of november.

In the context of the economic crisis in several parts of Europe, a lot of people are interested in returning to farming because of high unemployment rates and because of an ongoing growth of awareness about a sustainable future.

## International Initiatives

There was a meeting of «International Initiative» (formerly Global Movement 2012) in Geneva on the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of December. Ten people attended and planned the activities of 2013. The main activity will be carrying out a series of trainings on non-violence in Senegal (March), Brazil (June) and in Assam (India) in November, 2013. The report is available on [www.ektaeurope.org](http://www.ektaeurope.org).

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## Ekta Parishad Meeting in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India, on the 23<sup>th</sup> /24<sup>th</sup> December

The main topic of this meeting, where the state conveners and the national leaders of Ekta Parishad met the leaders of other collaborating organisations was the reorganizing of Ekta Parishads internal structures. Basically it will be established during this year by focusing on three main tasks: The development of group leadership, on a new kind of fundraising system and on building the village economy.

### Decentralisation and Democratisation: From the Capital back to the Villages

The participants of the December 23-24<sup>th</sup> meeting in Gwalior decided to establish a new organisational body of Ekta Parishad: The national and the state conveners will be replaced by a national and several state committees. The representatives of the associated organisations such as the CESC and the Gandhi Ashram in Madurai will meet occasionally in a forum of directors and secretaries. The central task for this group will provide the administrative and financial backup for the whole movement. On an international level the international committee will be built, which will take responsibility for the communication and cooperation with the international associates and the international community. The crucial role in the new structure will be played at the state level through state committees. The state committees must pressurize the state governments to act in order of the implementation of the federal laws and on the other hand the state committees have to strengthen the work on the grassroot level in the fields. They are backed by a national support team. A Special Eye will be held on the Indian Forest Rights Act ([www.forestrightsact.com](http://www.forestrightsact.com)). Since it's obviously focused on forests, it helps mostly Adivasi people as the ones who are actually living in the forests. Dalit people and other scheduled castes are required to show a habitation in the forest for 75 years. Although the Task Force is currently reviewing this clause of the FRA, the Adivasis are the main beneficiaries at the moment. It will therefore be in the duty of state-committees and the village workers, to see how to press for the implementation of the FRA.



### Strengthening the village workers

The most important part in the whole reorganisation process of Ekta Parishad is the strengthening of the leadership in the field: Therefore, the village workers have to be seen as the heart of Ekta Parishad. The goal is to implement a constant reflection on every level in the movement about the demands of the people in the villages and on the fields. For the 500 to 600 Village Workers of Ekta Parishad all over India the following will be their central tasks: developing their own personality, organizing their own community and the economy in the ten villages for which they are responsible for, train two leaders (one man/one women) in each village and link this villages with the outside world. In all this actions the village workers have to relate always on non-violent strategies of struggle. By receiving a monthly payment of 3000 Rupies per village worker, it is very obvious, that this tasks can only be fulfilled by very committed people. This commitment has to be developed and shared by everyone in the whole movement. Ekta Parishad will develop training programs to strengthen the village workers in their activities. On the one hand they will be reached out individually and help will be provided to raise their business, on the other hand experienced people will provide workshops on village-work.

### The role of the President

In order to strengthen this process towards flatter hierarchies and decentralization and also to contribute from personal- to group-leadership, the President of Ekta Parishad Rajagopal P.V. has decided to take distance to certain decision-makings. The Gwalior Meeting allowed Rajagopal to work in the future more on a national and international level. By doing so, he will (1) explore other national movements to seek new alliances and (2) provide a knowledge transfer between the different organizations across borders.

### Fundraising

All this reform steps make it necessary to build up new fundraising channels. But fundraising on a big level becomes in India more and more difficult: As India is today widely conceived as a global superpower international aid- and development organisations are withdrawing. It's all about small funding today: Addressing individuals and small groups, such as village communities in India or socially, politically and environmentally concerned house communities, activist groups, schools and cultural spaces in the west. The meeting in Gwalior decided therefore to build up a fundraising team, which intensifies the production of fundraising materials and uses documentation materials such as films, books, magazines and photos, agricultural products and handicrafts, such as honey, scarves and others as tools for fundraising. On the other side of the food-chain Ekta will build up an educational fund, a fund for women and a crisis fund for Ekta workers and activists who are in trouble, to better support its activists in there daily struggles.



**ekta europe**

connecting people's struggles in east and west.

**Ekta Parishad Europe has a new website! Check it out on [www.ektaeurope.org](http://www.ektaeurope.org)**

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