

National Land Reform Policy Update

By next week the Ministry of Rural Development has said it will announce the official establishment of the National Land Reforms Committee. The Committee will then design a National Land Reforms Policy as well as the strategies for its implementation. This policy must be designed so that the hundreds of thousands of India's landless citizens gain the basic right to own a piece of land and control the resources they depend on to live. A parallel facilitation team has also been formed to work with the Committee. The People's Commission on Land has been organized to act as an outside facilitator to any questions or issues that arise within the National Land Reforms Committee. Ekta Parishad will also form Mukhia Mahasammelan, a council of traditional tribal and dalit leaders. There will be a regular dialogue between Mukhia Mahasammelan, the National Land Reforms Committee, and the various state-level Land Reforms Departments so that the needs of the tribal and dalit communities are better understood and included in each level of policy formation. It is important to recognize the immense value in the traditional leadership structures that exist in India's rural communities, and to embrace the knowledge that they can offer to the National Land Reform Policy. Janadesh is a people's movement and it is the voice of the people that will determine the future of India's land



Strategies for the future

What do you get when you bring the leader of India's largest people's movement together with 50 of the movement's coordinators to discuss their ideas for the future direction of the struggle?

Well, if you add in some spirited nightly prayer meetings, a lot of humour and a space for the free expression of thoughts and concerns, you get an innovative vision for the future and some truly unique takes on some of the songs we learned so well during Janadesh.

On December 16th, Ekta Parishad leaders met for a week-long meeting at the Centre for Experiencing Social and Cultural Interaction (CESCI) in Tamil Nadu to discuss the strategies for the future of the Janadesh campaign. Several areas of focus were agreed upon, including the following;

National coordination teams will begin post-Janadesh actions by distributing 25,000 land-related grievances to State Land Revenue Departments. These grievances typically fall into four categories;

- i. Land registration and regularization pending
- ii. Possession of land without legal entitlement
- iii. Legal entitlement without possession
- iv. Land disputes that are tied up in state and revenue courts

Ekta Parishad will keep a running dialogue with all parties that have a role in the development and implementation of the land reform policies in order to ensure that these grievances are dealt with quickly and justly.

The strength behind Ekta Parishad lies with its grassroots leadership. These were the leaders that lead a group of 25,000 marchers peacefully over 350km, and these are the same leaders whose expertise Ekta Parishad will use to train the leaders of the future. There will be a series of training programs that focus on strengthening the leadership capacity of volunteers, youth, women, traditional tribal and dalit leaders, and panchayat members. The training manuals that will facilitate the training sessions will be shared with organizations interested in promoting non-violence as part of their strategy for creating positive change. Information and experience sharing is one aspect of Ekta Parishad's strategy for strengthening its network.



Journey Towards a New Freedom Struggle

For almost one year there has been a peace pilgrimage lead by Swami Sachidananda Bharathi to unite India for a "Second Freedom Struggle." Desh Vandana 2007 began on January 30th, 2007 in New Delhi and will end on January 30th, 2008 at Gandhi Mandapam in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. Following the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, this pilgrimage hopes to inspire economic, social and moral freedom for all of India's citizens. Swami Sachidananda came to the CESC meeting last week to address the audience and express his solidarity with Ekta Parishad and the Janadesh campaign. He spoke of a caste system that was the curse of India and the corruption that unites the country today. His vision for an India free of economic exploitation, hunger and fear can only come through the creation of a new freedom movement; a freedom movement that is possible through a people's movement like Ekta Parishad. Gandian Yogendra S. Parikh was also at the meeting and used the words of Vinoba Bhave to open his address; "those who are part of the struggle are revolutionaries." He commended Rajagopal and the leaders at the meeting for incorporating the need for inner spiritual growth into the plans for the future of the Janadesh movement, and spoke of his concern that many Gandhian organizations seemed to lack the spiritual base necessary for growth. Last week's meeting was in large part a space for dialogue about the value of living the principles of non-violence in all aspects of life. Rajagopal spoke of the future of the Janadesh movement as a journey towards a new freedom struggle. Part of this journey will include changing the way we understand word like "human resources," "education," and "leadership." Sometimes the most qualified people to teach and lead are those whose knowledge comes from life experience, not books and lecture halls. If Janadesh represents the struggle for universal rights to dignity and freedom, those that represent the voice of the people must also represent the values that can lead to social change.