

People's Union for Civil Liberties – Karnataka

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(Founder: Loknayak Jai Prakash Narayan)

To,
The Honourable Chief Justice,
Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka,
Bengaluru

Date: 26.03.2020

Respected Sir,

Sub.: Seeking registration of PIL in regard to the condition of and lack of food security to daily wage workers, migrant workers and homeless persons and during the period of the lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The People's Union for Civil Liberties is a civil society organisation that undertakes various activities to protect the civil and human rights of members of society, especially the economically and socially backward. We are the Karnataka Chapter of the national-level organization People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), which was founded by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan in the late 1970s as an organization for the defence of civil liberties and human rights. As part of our activities, we have taken up and filed public interest litigations in regard to the cause of the workers employed in the cleaning of manholes and maintenance of sewage systems all across the country, the condition of migrant workers, etc. One of our primary functions is to intervene directly in cases where gross violations of human rights take place.

The Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties was also the Petitioner before the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the Right to Food Case [Writ Petition (Civil) No.196 of 2001], wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court affirmed the right to food of every individual as intrinsic to the right to life protected under Article 21 of the Constitution.

We are writing to this Hon'ble Court in regard to the condition of the extremely vulnerable communities in light of the lockdown due to COVID-19. While the State and Central Government are both taking several steps to address this issue, we are primarily concerned with the condition of vulnerable communities. This includes daily wage workers, migrant workers, homeless persons, those residing in slums, street vendors, persons with disabilities. While on one hand they have no earnings, on the other hand they have very little access to ration which could put themselves and their family into serious peril.

The Deccan Herald and the Hindu have reported on 24th March, 2020 a report prepared by various trade unions and organizations that point out to the glaring lapses in ensuring food security to these vulnerable communities. The Times of India has written about the same in its edition dated 25th March, 2020. The report appearing in the Deccan Herald and the Hindu are both annexed herein. The report and recommendations on the basis of which the newsreports have appeared is also annexed herein.

It indicates that there is a serious crisis with an entire population not having access to even the very basic right of food. In fact, it is seen that workers are being required to take loans to buy even groceries. Migrant workers are most hit, since they don't have ration cards and without ration cards they aren't able to access the public distribution system. Most people have not been able to wages since wages have not been paid for the present month, and several of them had their employment closed down about ten days ago.

Similarly, those who are homeless, would be rendered without any food. The Indira Canteens which they were earlier able to have access to has also been closed and it is extremely concerning that they have no option but to go hungry.

It would not be out of place to point out that India is 102 out of 117 countries in the Global Hunger index and already has very high malnutrition issues. It is a recognized fact that earning is very low in India, which also reduces purchasing capacity.

The need of the hour today is to ensure that all persons irrespective of how poor they are or where they come from are ensured nutrition. Even if one were to fight this pandemic, at the very least they should have the nutrition and immune system for the same.

Our main prayer is to ensure complete food security to all through the Public Distribution System and to ensure that no person is left out of this system. There are also several recommendations that have been given in the report, which we also seek before this Hon'ble Court.

Since we are under lockdown, we don't have access to a printer, to have this printed. We request that in light of the urgency of the matter, this be taken in the form of an e-mail. We undertake that once normalcy is restored an entire set of all papers will be submitted by us.

It is in this context that we are approaching the Hon'ble High Court seeking that this be treated as a Letter-PIL so as to ensure that adequate steps are taken to protect these neglected communities and ensure that the basic right of food is made available to all persons.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Y.J. Rajendra
President (PUCL-K)

Annexure – 1: Report appearing in the Deccan Herald dated 24th March, 2020

Annexure – 2: Report appearing in the Hindu dated 24th March, 2020

Annexure – 3: Report appearing in the Times of India dated 25th March, 2020

Annexure – 4: Report prepared by various Unions and organizations detailed therein