A Statement of Solidarity with India’s Farmers & Farmworkers

Tens of thousands of small farmers and farmworkers in India are leading the largest protest in history to fight for economic, social, and food justice.

We stand in solidarity with them, and condemn the government-sanctioned violence and human rights violations being carried out by Prime Minister Modi’s government as a means to suppress dissent and independent journalism. The farmers are currently protesting three new agricultural bills that threaten to decimate their livelihoods.

In September 2020, the Indian government undemocratically passed three new agricultural bills that deregulate and privatize India’s agricultural industry by dismantling minimum support prices for crops, removing restrictions on purchase of land by corporations, and removing limits on stockpiling commodities. Agriculture is the primary source of income for over half of India’s population, 81% of whom are farming on two acres or less.¹ With no safety net, small farmers are vulnerable to being undercut by large corporations, ultimately unable to sustain themselves or their communities.²

By prioritizing corporations over people and the planet, these unjust laws further environmental degradation and economic oppression that is rooted in casteism and religious hegemony.

Dalit farm laborers continue to suffer from caste-based governmental oppression as well as abuse and harassment within farming communities. The vast majority of land owners and farmers in Punjab are Sikhs, who have historically faced religious persecution³ and suffered from decades of anti-farmer policies, insurmountable debt from a forced dependence on agrichemicals, and the highest cancer rates in the country. In 2019, a reported 10,281 farmers died by suicide in India, though the exact number is likely understated.⁴

Over 250 million people have peacefully protested these oppressive ordinances. These protests are as much about land rights as they are about human rights in a country grappling with deeply rooted nationalism. Protestors are being painted as terrorists by state-owned news outlets and are being met with government-sanctioned police brutality, tear gas and water cannons. Over a hundred protestors have disappeared at the hands of the police in the last week alone. Citizen journalists are being unlawfully arrested and detained for reporting on police brutality or voicing support for the farmers.⁵ The police have attempted to cut off access to food and water at protest sites to starve the protestors away. The Internet has been cut off in the area surrounding protest sites and social media is being heavily regulated to make communication amongst protestors and access to outside information more difficult. The UN has made clear that cutting internet connections as a means to stifle dissent is a violation of human rights.⁶ Yet even in the face of this oppression, the farmers continue to tirelessly fight for their right to be heard and survive. The role of a democratic government is to not silence dissent, but rather to listen. The right to protest is fundamental in any democracy.⁷

Small farmers are too often exploited in our global food and farming systems. As advocates for an equitable and just economy rooted in community, we stand in solidarity with India’s small
farmers and farmworkers who are tirelessly fighting against exploitative, unjust agricultural laws. We support their right to organize and protest, a pillar of accountability in any healthy democracy. We also call on our elected officials and the broader global justice community to condemn ongoing human rights violations perpetrated by Prime Minister Modi’s government, and support the farmers’ right to protest.

This letter was co-authored by
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3 History shows Punjab has always taken on tyrants. Modi is no different., Washington Post, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/12/16/rupi-kaur-modi-punjab-india-farmer-protests/

