

MEDIA ADVISORY
Launching ceremony of the report on
State of Peasants Rights in Sindh 2015

On 17th April, International Peasants Rights Days, Hari Welfare Association (HWA) in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) organized a launching ceremony of the report on the State of Peasants Rights in Sindh at press club Karachi.

Saiqa Bkhsa, Chairperson HWA, said that after the 18th Amendment, the federal Government of Pakistan should not pass legislation related to agriculture matters but introduction of the Seed (Amendment) Act 2014 and anti-peasants provision in it shows that the federal government continues to serve the vested interest of landlords and businessmen in Sindh. She also said that the Sindh Industrial Relations Act (SIRA) 2013 does not recognize peasants and fishermen as industrial workers but it appears that SIRA has worked well in deviating attention of peasant organizations. The law is vague and unclear, and its application in agriculture sector seems to be incompatible. Saiqa added that the Sindh Tenancy Act 1950- the primary law that governs the relationship between the peasant and the landlord- was not implemented though the law was amended in 2013. The STA recognizes many of the peasants' rights but since there is no implementation of the law and peasants are not registered with revenue department; therefore, they do not have rights over revenues and land utilization.

Akram Ali, Executive Director HWA, said that after the 18th amendment, the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (BLSAA) has also become a provincial subject but the Government of Sindh has not adopted the Act yet, and has also not taken measures to implement it rather it has given unlimited powers to landlords to exercise cruelty over poor and marginalized peasants. The Act should be amended to make the crime of debt bondage or forced labour as un-compoundable and non-bail able, and should also bind the revenue department to register the peasants working on the land for landlords but unfortunately pro-peasant amendments in the BSLAA and the STA are not possible because out of 164 members in the Provincial Assembly of Sindh (PAS), almost half of them were landlords, but if they were not landlords, they either belonged to landlord families or political parties dominated by landlords (such as PPPP, PMLF) rural parts of Sindh.

In 2013 to 2018 session of PAS, 69 MPAs' were landlords, which constitute 42 percent of the total MPAs in the PAS. Of the total landlords identified, 57 (84 percent) belong to PPPP, 4 are affiliated with PML (N), 7 with PML (F) and 1 with NPP. In National Assembly of Pakistan for the session 2013 to 2018, 36 MNAs from Sindh were big landlords. These 36 MNAs constitute 60 percent of the total 60 general seats (excluding 14 reserved seats) of Sindh in NA. One can imagine the representation of peasants in NA. Interestingly, out of 34 landlord MNAs on general seats, 30 (88 percent) were landlords from PPPP.

Karamat Ali/Zulfiqar Shah from PILER while referring to report's data, Karamat Ali/Zulfiqar Shah said that In Sindh, from 2013 to 2015, 1667 peasants were released and escaped from the landlords' captivity. Only in 2013 maximum (76 percent) number of peasants was released, but in 2014 and 2015, the number of released peasants declined considerably to 16 percent and 8 percent respectively. In 2015, in Sindh, 132 peasants were released from the captivity of landlords; of these, 51 were children, 53 women and 28 men. In 2014, 275 peasants were released from agriculture which includes 69 men, 91 women and 115 children. In cotton fields, estimated 500,000 peasant women were reported working as cotton pickers but they were devoid of basic health and economic rights, and no law recognized and

protected their rights as cotton pickers. In rural areas, peasant women and children also have to provide beggar services in landlords' houses without any remuneration.

Salih Bilo, political activist, acknowledged that the peasant movement not only in Sindh but across the country is extremely weak which has resulted sufferings for peasants.

The ILO's Zaheer Abbass said that agriculture can play significant role in reducing the poverty and food insecurity because agriculture is backbone of the province which provides about 50 percent revenue to Sindh as well as direct and indirect jobs to millions of people.

Muhammad Ali Shah from Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum showed concerned about loss of livelihoods and fisheries resources in rivers and canals in Sindh because of construction of barrages, commercialization of waters and corruption in irrigation department. He also agreed with the statement of the report that peasants have the right to be involved in the planning, formulation and adoption of the local and provincial level budgets being allocated for agriculture but in Sindh, no such practices are observed in which peasants were involved in any phase of budgeting.

On the occasion, Punhal Sario (peasant leader), Javed Qazi (intellectual) and many other spoke. A group of children also sang a peasant song.

Note: mentioned Name are expected to attend the conference, final press release will be issued at the end of conference.