

Press release: UN Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has failed to address peasants' issues and rights in Pakistan

Karachi: (5 November 2018): Hari Welfare Association (HWA) regrets that the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had given the least space to the peasants' issues and rights in the Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the initial report of Pakistan, which the Committee had adopted in June 2017. In November 2004, Pakistan had signed the UN Convent on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with reservations, which Pakistan withdrew in April 2008, and became a party to the Covenant in totality. After the succession to the Covenant, Pakistan had to submit the initial report in 2010, but submitted it six years late in October 2016, which raises questions the efficiency and capability of the Ministry of Human Rights of Pakistan and the other relevant human rights institutions, which were unable to submit the reports in a due time.

HWA also lamented that the Committee in the Concluding Observations and Recommendations had unfortunately not recognized Pakistani peasants as peasants instead labeled them as farmers, which is against the UN's draft declaration on the rights of peasants and other people in rural areas. They should be known as treated as peasants as defined in the UN draft declaration.

However, the more worrisome news in the Concluding Observations and Recommendations is, the Committee has covered only land rights of peasants in Sindh and Balochistan in just two brief paragraphs (67 and 68). However, the large number of peasants facing hardships in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces, especially peasants in Okara and their struggle are not mentioned in the Concluding Observations and Recommendations. The Committee also did not give specific recommendations that have caused havoc for peasants in Sindh for centuries rather dealt the matter with general recommendations related to land reforms. It urges Pakistan to take measures but lacks to mention any specific measures. HWA is deeply concerned that the existing peasants and small-scale landholders were losing lands and rights to cultivate lands through the mutual partnerships of the government of Sindh, feudal lords, and the private corporations in the name of projects like the World Bank and the Government of Sindh's the Sindh Agriculture Project.

HWA's Executive Director, Akram Ali Khaskheli, claimed that the UN's Committee system does not provide space and support to small-scale organizations to participate in drafting the final reports by the Committee. The Committee had never widely published or circulated the news of taking part in the Committee's relevant proceedings. HWA's regretted that in Pakistan, UN's system did not exist which could update, encourage and support the local organizations to get engaged in the Committee's dialogue with the state party (Pakistan).

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