

Press Conference on General Elections 2019 Fishing Communities Need Right Over Water Bodies



National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (I) Indicts National Political Parties for Failure to Keep their Promises to Fishing Communities

Demands Small Scale Fishers' & Fish Farmers' Right to Water Bodies



In a Press Conference at the Press Club of India, New Delhi on 29th March 2019 the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (I) demanded that the small and traditional fishing communities should have inalienable right over water bodies.

Pradip Chatterjee, National Convener of the Platform said that the small and traditional fishing communities are by far the largest primary non-consumptive stakeholders of our water bodies including the seas, rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs, tanks and ponds as well as their natural custodians as Good Fish needs Good Water. But there is no recognition of the fishing communities. They have no visibility. Fisheries or fishing communities have no mention in the National Water Policy of the country. Water bodies and their waters are being used, encroached, consumed and polluted without even informing the fishing communities, let alone taking their informed consent. This is because the fishing communities have no legal right over the waters on which they live. The farmers, the share croppers and even the agricultural labourers have legal right over agricultural land and/or livelihood based on that land but the fishers and fish farmers have none.

The small and traditional fishing communities need right over water bodies -

‘Humme Pani Patta Chahiye’

(‘We Need Water Titles’)

Pradip Chatterjee then accused the ruling political parties for their failure to keep their promises to the fishing communities. In 2014 BJP published its National Policy on Fisheries. It was the only national political party to have a policy on fisheries. Many prescriptions were made in it for protection and promotion of small scale fishing communities' life and livelihood. Precious little has been done during the 5 years of BJP Government. On the contrary the small scale fishing communities are facing devastation due to projects like Sagarmala, Industrial and Economic corridors, Merchant Shipping Corridor, River Linking, National Waterways. Statutory instruments for protection of natural resources and natural resource based livelihood are being continuously changed to make ways for business and corporate houses. Indiscriminate installation of industries, power plants and large tourism are lacerating and poisoning the surface water resources. Schemes under Blue Revolution and Blue Economy are pushing out the fishing communities and promoting investors and entrepreneurs.

He also said that similar treatment was meted out to the fishing communities by the Congress party as well. He cited the example of Coastal Regulation Zone Act, promised in 2011 by the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh of Congress Government with no action in the next 3 years of its tenure. He also mentioned the Fishing Communities' Rights Act, the need of which was stated by the then prime minister Manmohan Singh in 2012 with no action in the next 2 years of its tenure.

Fishing communities refuse to be laid by the false promises and tall talks of the political parties –

**Fishing Communities will Judge Political Parties
Not by their Promises but by their Actions.**

Representatives from fishing community organisations of different states presented the situation of their respective states.

Dr. Gulam Rasool from Jammu & Kashmir described the plight of the fishing communities who are being evicted from the Dal and Ular lakes of the Kashmir valley to make way for tourism. He also mentioned drastic reduction in the stock of fish in rivers like Jhilar, Chenab and Leader due to pollution and power plants.

D. Pal from the Democratic Traditional Fishers and Workers Forum of Andhra Pradesh spoke of the loot of fish by the mechanised fishing boats in the sea, devastation of fisheries by oil explorations in the KG Basin and other areas, rampant encroachment of the coastal land and waters by ports, tourism and aquaculture, destruction of river fisheries due to pollution and other water uses and corruption in the fisheries cooperatives.

Oinam Rajen Singh of the All Loktak Lake Area Fishermen's Union of Manipur stated the threats faced by the fishing communities of Loktak Lake due to rampant pollution and anti fishing community laws as well as state sponsored tourism. He spoke of the resistance of the fishing communities against the state government attempts to evict them from Loktak lake.

Hemant Das from Jharkhand spoke of the reduction of fish stock in the rivers like Sone and Koel due to construction of dams and the eventual migration of fishing communities to other occupations and areas.

Narayan Haldar from the Odisha Matsyajibi Forum (OMF) mentioned the extreme difficulties of the fishing communities due to fishing ban in protected areas like Bhitarkanika and Gahirmatha. He also spoke of the destruction of river fisheries due to severe pollution and use of river water for various consumptive purposes like agriculture, industry and municipal use.

Milan Das from Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum of West Bengal spoke of the ban and restriction on fishing in the Sundarban forest areas, loot and destruction of fish stock in the sea by mechanised fishing boats, devastation of river fisheries, usurpation of fisher cooperatives by vested interests and insecurity of tenure of small fish farmers.

Soumen Ray, National Coordinator of the Platform, requested all concerned to be sensitive to the demands of small scale fish workers not only for the fishing communities, but also to protect water bodies, fish and fish resources.

Pradip Chatterjee informed all concerned that the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers will approach the new government after the parliamentary elections with the charter of demand of small scale fish workers.

Dipak Dholakia, Delhi Coordinator of the National Platform had arranged for the Press Conference.