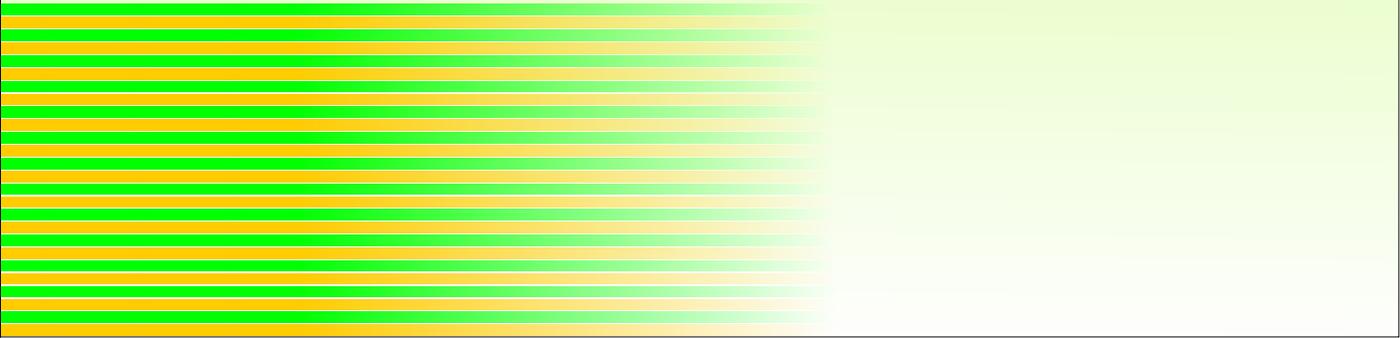




December 15

International Tea Day



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Preface

Agriculture sector across the world is undergoing a crisis subsequent to the structural rearrangements and deflationary policies of nation states. The tea industry, which is accountable for the livelihood of a major chunk of population in the developing and underdeveloped countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, is on the verge of collapse due to crises associated with fall in commodity prices and wages of workers. The ramifications of these crises are multifaceted. The commonly observed micro-level developments together with the macro-level rearrangements in all tea-growing countries are the decline of wages and commodity prices; emergence of small growers; closure and abandonment of large plantations; lower level of organization; absence and curtailment of or non-compliance with existing social security entitlements; and withdrawal of state subsidy for the tea sector. The new segment of small growers, which emerged from the structural rearrangement of the tea sector, and the plantation labourers at the lower level of the chain are the most affected groups of the present crisis.

It is imperative in this milieu to discuss the issues that directly or indirectly affect the small growers and workers in the tea sector. With this objective, the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), New Delhi, and the Institute of Social Development (ISD), Kandy, Sri Lanka, jointly facilitated an International Tea Conference and International Tea Day with the active participation of trade unions from India. The conference was coordinated and organized by the United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) from India, in collaboration with other central trade unions and with the support of CEC and ISD. The key objective of the conference was to frame a universal declaration on the rights of the tea workers and small growers in order to strengthen advocacy and campaign activities at various levels.

Delegates from various countries, namely Bangladesh, In-

Indonesia, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and Vietnam, participated in the two-day conference on December 13–14, 2005, and the International Tea Day celebration the following day, in New Delhi. There were noteworthy inputs from people from various walks of life comprising academicians, trade union members, people's representatives, activists, small growers, factory owners, and journalists. The conference tried to place the present crisis in the wider canvas of structural reorganization. This was supplemented by individual country experiences. On the basis of these inputs, the conference proposed an International Declaration on the rights of the tea workers and small growers. The declaration broadly covered the principles of living wages, ownership of homestead land for tea workers, tripartite regulatory mechanisms for grievance redress, pricing and monitoring, occupational safety and health, rights of women, employment and social security of workers, trade union rights, regulation of uneven competition, and effective and meaningful campaign for the realization of the declaration.

The conference was followed by the celebration of International Tea Day on December 15, 2005. The decision to observe International Tea Day on December 15, 2005, was taken after deliberations among various international organizations and trade unions during the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India (2004) and Porto Alegre, Brazil (2005). The International Tea Day aimed at affirming the rights of plantation workers and small growers, building awareness and responsiveness among all the concerned bodies, identifying responsible policy decisions, strengthening advocacy and campaign, and promoting tea trade.

The International Tea Day meeting, after daylong deliberation, reached a viable plan of action for the realization of the agenda of the International Declaration and the objectives of the International Tea Day celebrations. It was decided to use the declaration document as an instrument of advocacy and implementation. Other important proposed interventions

were campaigns at regional, national, and international levels for the International Commodity Agreement on Tea, formation of an international advisory group, creation of a bi-monthly newsletter, and coordination with other concerned organizations that are not part of the network.

The International Tea Conference was a coordinated endeavour of various organizations and individuals. We would like to express our profound sense of gratitude for the countless support of those individuals and institutions that helped in making this initiative meaningful. We also extend our gratitude to the central trade unions as well as other national, regional, and sectoral trade unions of India for their support and participation. We thank all the national and international representatives of trade unions and small growers for their constructive participation in the conference.

The International Tea Day Convention on December 15, 2005, was jointly organized by the Central Trade Unions of India, coordinated by the UTUC. Mr. Ashok Ghosh, General Secretary, UTUC, played a key role in the mobilization.

The sessions were enriched by the contribution of many who shared various aspects related to the tea industry. We make a special mention of Mr. Mohammad Amin, Minister for Labour, West Bengal; Mr Dawa Narbula and Mr Joachim Buxla, Members of Parliament; Ms Leyla Tegmo Reddy, Director, South Asia Sub Regional Office, ILO; Professor Utsa Patnaik, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Professor Abhijit Sen, Member, Planning Commission, India; Ms Sukti Dasgupta, Employment and Labour Market Policy Specialist, South Asia Sub Regional Office, ILO; and Mr D. Chakrabarti, Former Secretary General of the Indian Tea Association, for their valuable contributions.

There were incredible efforts from CEC, New Delhi, and ISD, Kandy, in conceiving and developing the entire theme and facilitating the International Tea Conference and Tea Day programme. Rinju Rasaily, CEC, showed remarkable sense

of purpose while coordinating the events. She received valuable support from Sindhu Menon, Labourfile. P. Muthulingam, Director, ISD, Sri Lanka, was not only party to conceiving the idea but instrumental in bringing it to fruition as well. Varghese Joseph and Shweta Singh designed the well-received campaign materials. We would like to especially thank Sanjay Kumar, Uganda, for providing us with key contacts in Africa. We gratefully acknowledge the inestimable support from CEC, notably from Pallavi Mansingh, Alet Mathew, Priyanka Gupta, P. N. Vamadevan, Meena Sharma, and Surjit Singh in making this programme momentous. Vimal Khawas and Sobin George contributed in the production of this report.

Besides providing financial assistance for the International Tea Conference, Christian Aid, UK, popularized the idea globally by integrating it within the Trade Justice Campaign. The idea was also picked up by Action Aid, UK; Tea Coalition, The Netherlands; and Bread for the World, Germany.

J. John
Executive Director,
Centre for Education and Communication

International Tea Conference: *A Brief Report*

Background

The tea industry across the world is experiencing an extensive restructuring in terms of production organization. This development has been triggered by the interplay of various actors including buyers and brands at the upper end of the value chain. Therefore, there is an increase in the demand and supply of tea at large despite a fall in the commodity price of tea in all countries. However, the benefits of over-production in the tea industry are directed more towards the global brands and the intermediaries at the higher end of the value chain.

World trade in tea is witnessing significant changes under the WTO commodity policies. The structure of the global commodity tea trade under the WTO compulsions provides an absolute advantage to transnational brands and retailers in the trade. Policies by nation states in line with the WTO compulsions such as removal of tariff and import of tea from other countries largely reduce the commodity prices of tea

in the producing countries. This has created a situation where the demand is not increasing but pushing global commodity prices further downwards resulting in closures and abandonment of tea gardens. The situation enables global brands to get tea at the lowest possible prices.



The interventions of the respective states as well as international agencies to correct the imbalances are fast disappearing. The concentration of power at the level of 'brands' and 'super-markets' has resulted in slow vanishing of the clearly existing national tea markets. Consequently, the vulnerability of small growers and tea workers is increasing in all countries. In India alone, more than two million people obtain their livelihood from activities associated with production, value addition, and marketing of tea.

Objective of the International Tea Conference

In the context of the changing global situation, the International Tea Conference was held with the objective of discussing pertinent issues in relation to the tea sector that directly or indirectly affect the tea workers and small growers. This conference aimed at arriving at a Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Tea Workers and Small Growers in order to strengthen advocacy and campaign both locally and globally.

Organizers of the Conference

The International Tea Conference was jointly organized by the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), India, and the Institute of Social Development (ISD), Sri Lanka, on December 13–14, 2005, at Hotel Hill View, Surajkund, Faridabad, India.

Participants

The delegates, mainly well-known trade union leaders and small tea growers' representatives, from various tea-growing countries, namely Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and Vietnam, participated in the two-day conference and the subsequent International Tea Day programme. Besides the above delegates, academicians and elected people's representatives from India also contributed in the conference (see Annexure).

Discussions and Inputs

Day 1 (December 13, 2005)

J. John, Executive Director, CEC, introduced the delegates to the conference followed by a brief introduction of the participating delegates and other dignitaries. He raised certain issues pertinent to the tea sector. A few of the issues highlighted were as follows.

- The need to revisit the 'colonial' definition of 'plantation'
- Prevailing severe competition among the tea-growing countries
- Decline in the auction price of tea
- Diminishing share of tea and coffee in the branded segment of products with the impact of the global commodity chain
- Fall in the quality of tea and increasing pressure by the WTO sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards that has raised questions of environmental and labour situation across the tea-growing countries

He stressed that the conference aimed at discussing and deliberating on these issues that characterized the tea industry.

He also indicated that the primary objective of the conference was to evolve a declaration to be submitted to the governments and civil societies of the respective tea-growing countries.

P. Muthulingam, Director, Institute of Social Development, Kandy, Sri Lanka, shared the message sent by the Sri Lankan Labour Minister at the



conference. The message voiced the present condition of the tea industry and the need to address the situation. The role of the trade unions in this regard was also well acknowledged. .

Key Presentations

The conference attempted to place the present crises in the tea industry in the larger context of macro-economic policies and trade issues. Prof. Utsa Patnaik¹ elucidated upon the present agrarian crises with the changes happening in the real world and the resultant rearrangements in the macro-economic policies of the nation states. This was supplemented by country presentations made by the respective participants. In line with the present agrarian crises, all the tea-growing countries marked a decline in the commodity prices, of both raw leaf and manufactured tea, as well as in the wage structure of the workers. While a few countries like Sri Lanka noted progress in the production and exports of tea, it remained stagnant or declined in some other countries. The commonly observed micro-level developments in tune with the macro-level rearrangements in all tea-growing countries are decline of wages and commodity prices; emergence of small growers; closure and abandonment of large plantations; lower level of organization; absence of social security entitlements; and withdrawal of state subsidy for tea sector. Prof. Patnaik attributed this crisis in the industry to the processes of liberalization and its contingencies, including deflationary economic policies.

Prof. Utsa Patnaik highlighted the macro-economic scenario of the agriculture sector in developing countries in the context of liberalization and globalization. She also shed light on the deflationary economic policy attributable to the present agrarian crisis facilitated by the dominance of global financial capital whose interest lies in maximizing the financial capital. She emphasized that the deflationary agenda of the international organizations has had a negative impact on the employment conditions in the country. She also tried to

¹ Prof. Utsa Patnaik (Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, CESP, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi).

link the livelihood issues of the people in the agriculture sector, specifically tea, with the larger issues of increasing supply and stagnating demand.

Country Reports

Delegates from the participating countries made presentations, highlighting issues related to tea workers and small growers. The major points highlighted were as follows.

Sri Lanka

- Tea production and export has increased considerably in the last few decades.
- Workers exploitation has increased over the years. Plantation workers are still the lowest paid workers.
- Strikes were launched for better wages subsequent to the privatization move in the country, which led to the first collective agreement in 1998. The agreement ensured that every two years a collective agreement would be signed for wage increase.

Malawi

- Small tea growers are the highest quality tea producers in the country.
- A government guiding policy for tea industry is unavailable. This handicaps the labour unions in mobilizing the labour force.
- Increase in the prices of fuel and power, tariffs, non-tariff barriers, etc. are the major problems for both the small holders and the overall tea industry.

Malaysia

- No governmental assistance and capital to small tea growers
- Steep decrease in tea production over the years has led to reduction in exports and growth in import
- Frequent landslides are one of the major hindrances in extending the land under tea cultivation.

Vietnam

- Small growers account for about 70 per cent of the total cultivated area of tea.
- The majority of the farmers produce tea along with other agricultural crops and livestock.
- Despite the reduction of tea prices in the world market, small tea growers get a relatively high price for their product.
- Trade union lends support to workers and plantations to cope with various problems relating to product quality and management of the system.

Nepal

- Almost 60 per cent of the tea plantation workers in Nepal are women.
- Tea industry is characterized by technological problems, low productivity and quality of CTC tea.
- The country has very few processing factories.
- Tea is exported to Germany, USA, Japan, UK, India, and Pakistan whereas tea is imported mainly from India.
- Nepal has a very little direct access to the international market.

Bangladesh

- Of the 162 tea gardens in Bangladesh, 36 are sick. The sick gardens are under private or proprietary ownership.
- Small-holder sector in tea is a recent phenomenon.
- Non-utilization of scientific methods and diversion of funds to other purposes and under-utilization of land allotted for tea cultivation have had a negative impact on the tea industry.
- Workers are deprived of their just wages and other facilities and there is widespread curtailment of and non-compliance with existing social security entitlements.

- Trade union has no legal place as per the union acts and regulations prevailing in the country. The authorities suppress trade union activities through various law-enforcing agencies.
- Decreasing number of permanent workers and increasing number of casual workers though the area of cultivation and production of tea is gradually increasing.

Tanzania

- With increase in tea production, there has been an associated increase in labour problems.
- The situation of small tea growers is not very conducive in terms of prices.
- The government has left the production in the hands of the private sector and retained only the regulatory function.

Uganda

- Domestic tea market is still underdeveloped.
- Globalization and the entry of multinational companies have brought about a higher degree of competition in the tea sector.
- On the one hand, competition has affected the tea industry but on the other hand, the small workforce is better paid as a result of the advent of the private sector.
- Small growers cannot afford modern technology and are still heavily dependent on simple farming practices.
- Globalization has created a migratory and landless community.

Kenya

- Earnings from tea exports have been declining over the last five years despite rise in production volumes.
- Plantation workers, through the union, have been struggling for increased remuneration.

- While small holders argue that they have not been remunerated enough, plantation owners argue that labour costs have eaten deeply into company profits, accounting for about 55 per cent of the total operating costs.
- The government has shown concern for the plight of small holders who continue to earn less, and has recommended a sharp reduction in production volumes in order to curtail oversupply.

Indonesia

- Indonesia's share in world tea production stands at 5 per cent.
- Tea workers obtain the basic wage without any other allowances. Further, the wage rate in tea plantation sector is lower than in other sectors.
- Plantation sector is characterized mainly by casual workers (about 70 per cent).
- Trade unions do not have enough authority to protect workers as many of their members occupy positions in the management of the companies.
- Workers have limited access to labour regulation and law.

India

- A number of tea estates have been closed down or abandoned by planters across the tea-producing States.
- A large number of tea workers have lost their employment and there have been many instances of starvation deaths and suicides.
- Over 60 per cent of the permanent labourers comprise women, and their condition is deplorable.
- Increased casualization of the labour force across the tea gardens
- Considerable discrepancy in wages across the tea-producing States

- Although tea industry has been included in the list of Minimum Wages Schedule, leading companies are continuously violating it.
- Tea is moving from being a commodity market to a brand market.
- Private tea processing factories or bought leaf factories have increased.

The presentations were followed by discussions on specific country situations. Aspects such as the workload of labourers across the tea-growing countries, prevalence of child labour, code of conduct for tea estates and small growers, and uneven wage structure of the labourers among different countries were underscored by most of the participants in the discussion.

Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, Convenor, North Bengal Small Tea Growers Association, briefly highlighted the issues related to small tea growers in India. He pointed out that small tea growers produce 169 million kilograms of tea every year. About 1.37 lakh small tea growers and 370 bought leaf factories account for about one-fifth of the total tea production in the country. He stressed the need to form Self Help Groups (SHGs) among the small tea growers.

J. John, while putting the discussed points into perspective, opined that aspects like privatization, wages, government support, social security, labour administration, tariff reduction, and space for unionization and collective bargaining need further deliberation and place in the declaration.

H. Mahadevan, Deputy General Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), added to the list of potential areas of interventions identified in the discussion. He said that aspects such as globalization and market, women and child labour, law enforcements and grievance redress, role of government, trade union rights, and the protection of the interests of small growers and workers must necessarily be incorporated in the declaration.

Day I I (December 14, 2005)

The issues highlighted on the first day were further deliberated upon the second day, with a mission to draft a declaration on the rights of tea workers and small growers on International Tea Day. The day began with the presentations of key speakers, Prof. Abhijit Sen², Member, Planning Commission, Government of India and Ms Sukti Dasgupta³ from ILO.

Prof. Sen began with an argument on a major imbalance in the demand and supply of tea in the world. While the supply has been persistently increasing, the demand, conversely, has been either static or declining. Like Prof. Patnaik, he also stated that plantation crops are under huge pressure due to the recent deflationary policy. Large plantations are producing less and small growers are producing more. More importantly, small growers are growing at a good pace and are not bound by the quality checks, creating a huge gap in/pressure on demand and supply. He further told the gathering that small producers adopt low-cost production and processing methods and thus manage to reduce their cost of production significantly. This, in a way, adversely affects the large plantations where the cost of production is higher compared to the small growers.

Ms Dasgupta emphasized that the primary goal of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is to ensure opportunity, equitability, security, and voice to the workers. She indicated that there is need to promote instruments for achieving decent work. The deficits of decent work need to be examined in the context of closure of tea gardens, medical facility, health, education, starvation death/hardship, housing conditions, casualization, lockouts without notice, and violence. In her summing up, she said that ILO is concerned about issues of decent work environment, adequate social security, long-term

² Prof. Abhijit Sen, economist and Member of Planning Commission, Government of India.

³ Ms. Sukti Dasgupta, Employment and Labour Market Specialist, International Labour Organization, New Delhi.



viability, sustainable investment and jobs, and constitution of a National Tripartite Advisory Board in the tea sector.

The presentations were followed by discussions on the rise in price of tea for consumers, stagnation and decrease of wages of the workers, widening gap in the auction and consumer prices, and other structural problems in the tea industry. Some of the participants expounded on the prevalence of child labour and the specific issues of women workers such as multiple responsibilities, abuse and harassment at the work sites, and discriminatory wages.



The discussion was followed by the presentation of a preliminary declaration, drawn from earlier deliberations and discussions at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, and Porto Alegre. The draft declaration was prepared with earlier inputs from Sukti Dasgupta, Ashim Roy, and J. John. Inputs from the discussions of the first day of the conference were incorporated in the declaration by the organizers. The declaration was read out by Subash Sen, Secretary, National Council, AICCTU.

This was done for the sake of clarifications, doubts, and reservations, if any, with respect to the points of the preliminary declaration amongst the participating delegates. The draft declaration was finalized with additional inputs from the participants.

Key Areas Addressed in the Declaration

Some of the key areas addressed in the declaration and decisions taken included the following.

- Affirmation of the principle of living wages; wages should not be linked to the price of tea
- Joint ownership of homestead land for tea workers
- Establishment of tripartite regulatory mechanisms for the closure of gardens
- Creation of a separate authority for small growers for fixation of tea prices
- Need for a separate pricing and monitoring system for small tea growers to ensure them a fair price
- Attention to occupational safety and health issues
- End to the exploitation of women workers who constitute the majority of the workers; setting up of gender-health desk to address gender issues
- Setting up of special agencies and monitoring of social security of tea workers
- Respect for trade union rights, which are universal rights
- Avoid uneven competition among tea-growing nations
- Carry forward an effective campaign and create an appropriate platform to realize the contents of the declaration

One of the main demands made was the constitution of an International Tea Commission. The participants at the International Tea Conference reaffirmed the observance of the International Tea Day (December 15) in the subsequent years. The declaration was circulated and presented the next day, International Tea Day, at the Constitution Club, New Delhi.

International Tea Day: *A Brief Report*

Background

International Tea Day was observed on December 15, 2005, worldwide to draw the attention of governments and citizens to the impact of current forms of global trade in tea on workers, small growers, and consumers. The decision to observe International Tea Day was taken after deliberations among various international organizations and trade unions during the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, 2004 and Porto Alegre, 2005. In India the call to observe International Tea Day was given by the trade unions — AITUC, AICCTU, BMS, CITU, HMS, INTUC, UTUC, NTUI, and TUCC — and the Centre for Education and Communication, New Delhi. Subsequently, a one-day programme was held in New Delhi on December 15, 2005. Besides the trade union members, small growers, voluntary organizations, and academicians were among the key participants in the programme. The broad objective of the programme was to affirm the rights of plantation workers and small growers in the context of the emerging global trade regime.

Objectives

Following were the major objectives of the International Tea day programme.

- To affirm the rights of tea plantation workers and small growers in the context of the emerging global trade regime
- To build awareness and responsiveness among all the concerned bodies: owners, management, government, trade unions, and workers with regard to both trade and labour standards
- To identify necessary policy decision both nationally and

internationally and to advocate the promulgation of policy decisions, institutional systems, and their implementation

- To suggest regulatory mechanisms, including transparent monitoring systems, to be set up at various levels
- To strengthen future advocacy and campaign at an international level
- To facilitate tea consumption and promotion of trade in tea

Address by the Chief Guest and Other Dignitaries

International Tea Day began with an introduction by Ashok Ghosh, General Secretary, UTUC, Kolkata. He mentioned the deliberations that took place at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, 2004 and Porto Alegre 2005, and emphasized the rationale for observing an International Tea Day. On behalf of the Central trade unions, Ashok Ghosh proposed a presidium, comprising members from AITUC, AICCTU, BMS, CITU, HMS, and INTUC. He welcomed Mohammad Amin, Minister for Labour, West Bengal, the Chief Guest of the programme, and requested him to inaugurate the conference.

Minister Mohammad Amin stressed upon the consequences of uneven competition and fall in tea auction prices, and referred to the significant job loss in the tea gardens of India. The prevailing situation has led to about 60,000 workers being rendered jobless till now. In his opinion, conspicuously substantial variations in wages across the countries could be attributable for the uneven competition among producing countries. He requested all the representatives and government bodies from across the world present at the conference to ensure decent wages, social security, housing, education, and sanitation facilities for the workers and small growers and to find out ways and means for a 'healthy trade' by ruling out uneven competitiveness.

He cited the case of West Bengal where the government extended help and relief to the workers through the *panchayat*. A scheme subsuming a financial aid of Rs 500 per month is being implemented for the workers in the closed or abandoned tea gardens in the State to avoid starvation-related deaths. The State government paid Rs 25 crore for the closed tea gardens, mills, and factories. He stressed on the importance of the tea industry as a source of livelihood for workers and small growers and appealed to all the representatives from different countries to come forward for the sustenance of the industry. He concluded his speech by highlighting the need for more organized activities at various levels.

Dawa Narbula, Member of Parliament (MP) from West Bengal welcomed the observation of the International Tea Day. He said that the tea industry contributes the largest share of revenue to the State government and also provides the largest share of employment in West Bengal.

Tea gardens in Darjeeling employ around 55,000 workers on a permanent roll and 20,000 workers on contract basis during the plucking season. The workers in most of the tea gardens are deprived of their basic rights and facilities stated under the Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951, he said. He invited the attention of all authorities concerned for taking up stringent measures to ensure the provisions under the PLA for workers.

Joachim Baxla, Member of Parliament, West Bengal, highlighted the issue of price stabilization of tea through monitoring mechanisms. He mentioned that there is no price monitoring mechanism available for a significant chunk of tea (40–45 per cent) sold through auction. Promotion of tea in the context of declining per head consumption was yet another debate triggered by the speaker. He pointed out the role of the Tea Board in the promotion of tea trade in India. His speech also touched upon issues relating to healthy competition among tea-producing countries and effective and meaningful utilization of funds released to the industry. The MP also drew everyone's attention towards the payment of

bills, especially overdue bills like retirement benefits to workers.

D. Chakrabarti, Former Secretary General of the Indian Tea Association and Adviser, JustTea Project, explained the history of global tea trade. Tea has always been an important commodity of trade even before the era of globalization, he said. He attributed the decline of tea prices to global oversupply due to the emergence of several new players in the global tea market over the last few decades. The growth of the small growers segment has led to increase in the supplies affecting the prices of the domestic zone.

In his opinion, there was significant scope of increasing the per head consumption of tea in India. He explained that the domestic consumption of tea in India is around 630–670 million kg per year and the per head consumption of tea is 630–640 grams annually, which is much less than that in many tea-consuming countries like the UK or Pakistan. He stressed the need to expand the domestic market to tide over the crisis instead of relying merely on international market, where access is largely dependent on competitiveness. He expressed the need to administer the supply to keep a check on quality, which would automatically cut down the quantity.

J. John, Executive Director, Centre for Education and Communication, while placing the New Delhi Declaration¹ on the rights of tea workers and small growers adopted at the two-day International Tea Conference before the audience, positioned the current crises of the tea industry in the changing milieu of production organization. He emphasized that the general shift found in tea production units from the estate system to the small tea growers is primary due to higher level of efficiency and lower cost of production of the latter. Additionally, such a shift was largely being promoted by big plantations and brands that disengaged from primary commodity production and moved to retailing and brand building in search of higher profits. In India, the small tea growers segment account for 20 per cent of the tea production.

¹ See the International Declaration annexed to this document.

In such a situation, governments should not encourage trade policies that cater to tariff reduction, resulting in unhealthy and unethical competition among countries, which would also lead to unemployment.

Swapn Mukherjee, Joint Secretary, AICCTU, expressed his solidarity with the International Tea Conference and the decision to observe International Tea Day. He said that the small farmers and growers were affected due to the WTO trade regime and it was extremely necessary for governments to intervene to fix floor-level price for the survival of the small growers and workers. He highlighted the case of the Dumduma Tea Estate in Assam, which has been taken over by Hindustan Lever. Such mergers and takeovers in the tea sector by companies such as Nestle and Unilever were increasing, he said. He restated that the crisis was man-made and induced by the policies. He stressed the need for a more united action for plantation workers and small growers.

M. A. Ramaih, General Secretary, Red Flag Association, Sri Lanka, explained the context of privatization of tea plantations in Sri Lanka. He mentioned that former nationalized plantations in Sri Lanka had begun to be privatized following pressure from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) as part of the conditionality for financial assistance.

The Asian Development Bank had granted a loan of Rs 300 million to the private sector for developing the plantations. Subsequently, an increasing trend of downsizing of workforce in large plantations was noted. He said that this was executed largely in tune with the compulsions of these organizations. The banks have now started intervening in the management of the estates. He further pointed out that large Indian tea companies were controlling plantations in Sri Lanka and that “the companies will not invest if there is no profit”. He said that given the background of brand and bank domination (largely referring to the conditionalities and compulsions of banks), it was important for the working class movement to express solidarity in the international movement.

Somesh Biswas, President, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, West Bengal, expressed concern that the crisis in the industry was adversely affecting workers, small growers, factory owners, and others. Therefore, there should be coordinated efforts from all stakeholders including workers, growers, management, government, and trade unions to revitalize the industry.

Patrick Kadyanji, President, Plantation and Workers Union, Malawi, took note of the increasing trend of de-unionization in the tea sector in Malawi. According to him, there were 83,000 plantation workers who were scared to join unions for the fear of losing their jobs. Another problem in unionizing was the scattered nature of workforce, which made it all the more difficult to commute and communicate.

Aggrey Lazurus Mwakajila, Chairman, Rungwe Smallholder Tea Growers Association, Tanzania, congratulated Asia — China, India, and Sri Lanka — as the first and the largest producer of tea. He highlighted issues pertaining to Africa where international trading was practised through Fair Trade in most parts. As per the norms of Fair Trade, a minimum price for tea is fixed so that even if prices fall, tea is bought at a fair price. He said that small holders added a value of about 24–25 per cent. The increase in the price of tea is found to be directly proportional to the addition of value in many cases. For instance, in Tanzania, there was a substantial increase in price where the value addition was up to 40 to 45 percent.

H. Mahadevan, Deputy General Secretary, AITUC, held forth on the effect of the prescription of LPG — liberalization, privatization, and globalization — on the financial health of the world, by the ‘three international doctors’ (WTO, World Bank, and IMF). This, according to him, had only created more ill health, as in the case of the tea industry and agriculture. He underlined the importance of trade union movements to work in alliance with the working class movement. The problems of tea industry, workers, and small growers must be combined and carried forward, he said. According

to him, the Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended replanting of tea bushes in India. Stressing on these points, he explored the possibilities of planning regional programmes in all the participating countries in connection with International Tea Day.

Raymond Jatmiko Kusnadi, International Officer, Congress of Indonesia Unions Alliance (KASBI), extended support to all trade unions of India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Bangladesh on behalf of Indonesian workers. According to him, the problems of exploitation of capitalism, disorganization were similar everywhere in the world. He called for a united action including all sectors.

Suneet Chopra, Joint Secretary, All India Agricultural Workers Union, opined that it was important to speak about the new situation in terms of liberalization, globalization, and privatization. He pointed out that there was no rule of the law in any situation covering the working class and unorganized sector. He underscored the need to come together, organize, and fight for a common cause. Referring to the delayed comprehensive agriculture legislation, which was framed in 1980, he drew the attention of the conference to the need to fight for legislative measures for safeguarding the agriculture sector. He asserted that the one and only way out was organization and fight for the rights of the workers and small growers.

Tapan Datta, Chief Advisor, Chittagong Tea Garden Workers' Union, Bangladesh, thanked the organizers of the conference on behalf of the workers of Chittagong. He mentioned that the tea workers were among the poorest in Bangladesh, as compared to India. He stressed that the conference was a beginning and a process to fight against the pressures of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO.

Leyla Tegmo Reddy welcomed all the delegates and participants from various regions. She mentioned that the decline in the wholesale price of tea affected labour relations and the quality of life of the tea workers and their families and

small growers. She appreciated the networking organized by the unions to fight to alleviate poverty. She further mentioned that the ILO was extremely concerned about the inhuman conditions in which the workers were forced to work in tea plantations and the deficits in decent work in the plantation sector. She also stressed the need for promotion of occupational safety and health for workers in the tea plantations and for generating awareness on this issue. In March 2004, the ILO organized a tripartite meeting with different stakeholders to understand the common problems in the Indian tea industry. She hoped to remain engaged in encouraging decent work in the tea industry in India and looked forward to continue working together with the tea workers.

Samir Roy, General Secretary, HMS, West Bengal State Council, thanked Leyla Tegmo Reddy for her deliberations. He mentioned that the ILO had worked earlier in the field of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and child labour and was now working in the area of decent work. He appealed to her to take up the issues of HIV/AIDS in the tea sector. He then requested H. Mahadevan to read out a message sent by the associated European tea community. The message shed light on various issues subsuming trade justice movements, fair trade, fighting against the WTO, plantation labour, celebrating the issue of tea conference, and solidarity and support by networking with concerned organizations in the UK.

Devendra Sharma, from the Forum of Bio Technology and Food Security, after addressing the delegates mentioned that since inception, tea industry has been 'corporate agriculture'. He referred to the case of West Bengal, the State that had made progressive steps in the field of agriculture and labour, moving to corporate agriculture and steps like permitting FDI in retailing. He highlighted some of the key issues with regard to the global situation in the tea sector as well.

He pointed out the contradictions in tea export and established that aspects like value addition, processing, brand building, and marketing were vital in the exports of tea. For

instance, though India, China, Sri Lanka, and Kenya were the main producers of tea, the major exporters were England, Luxembourg, and Belgium as they value-added, processed, and marketed tea. Even though these three countries did not grow tea, they had the largest share in the market. He pointed out the need to understand the reason for such gaps. He clarified that the problem lay with the incentives for export promotion that the big companies availed in their home countries. He also expressed concern over falling commodity price and raising the consumer price of tea. Aspects such as Intellectual Property Rights and patenting of tea that give an edge to the big companies were discussed in the context of falling commodity prices of tea. According to him, this could be a major reason for the gap in prices. He raised some pertinent questions that require further scientific analysis regarding multilateral, regional, and bilateral trade agreements and patents and their impact on competition, pricing, and working conditions.

Chitta Dey, Convenor, Coordinator Committee of Tea Plantation Workers, West Bengal, invited attention to the problems of the workers in the plantations. Workers were the most affected group in the present crisis in the industry. The wages of workers had been reduced in all tea gardens across the country. This had plunged the workers into extreme situations of poverty. He was of the opinion that the industrialists and governments, both at the Centre and State, were responsible for the crisis in the tea industry. He ended his speech highlighting the importance of working as per the ethos of the Universal Declaration.

P.T. John, Secretary, Plantation Working Class Union, Kerala, highlighted the conditions of the tea plantation workers and small growers in Kerala. He mentioned the formation of the Plantation Working Class Union and its activities in helping in the reopening of tea gardens. He raised the issue of continuing lockouts in most of the large plantations in Munnar and Peerimedu areas of Kerala. The situation had forced thousands of plantations workers into poverty and inhuman

living conditions. The workers did not get subsidized food grains, electricity, and medical facilities in the region.

Mr. John, like other speakers, expressed concern over the existing gap in the commodity and consumer prices of tea. While the minimum price of tea in the market was Rs 120 per kilogram, raw leaf was priced at less than Rs. 7 per kilogram. In such a situation, small growers were unable to sell their raw leaf, as it did not recover their cost of production. He also mentioned the non-cooperation of Indian Railways while the small growers' organization pitched for the right of serving tea in trains and railway stations. He opined that the quality standards as set by the railway were aimed at promoting big brands like 'Tata Tea'.

He brought in other pertinent issues such as land rights and safety measures for workers. Referring to the cases of cancer and skin diseases among women workers in the plantations in Kerala, he mentioned that weedicides and herbicides were also affecting the health of the workers along with pesticide exposure. He pointed out the need to focus on the health issues of the women workers in tea plantations.

Kumari Kujur, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), West Bengal, requested the international delegates to incorporate the specific issues of women and children involved in plantation works in the proposed International Declaration. She explored the scope of including issues such as the health conditions of women and children and education of children in the future course of actions. She further added that there was a need to create awareness on health (not be limited to family planning), education, and employment issues among tea plantation workers.

Samir Roy, Convenor, Federation of Indian Plantation Workers, reminded the gathering that since the end of the 1990s the workers had been experiencing the bitter effects of crisis in the tea industry. He elucidated upon the multifaceted problems of people associated with tea industry. As many del-

legates observed, the most affected group of the present crisis were workers who were not even getting their wages and other fringe benefits. In his view, trade unions often settled for lower wages in the name of the crisis in the industry. During 2001–03, many workers and their dependents died of starvation in the tea gardens of West Bengal and Kerala. He raised the issue of remuneration of workers and small growers. He called for a standard rate of remuneration for both small growers and workers, referring to the Sri Lankan concept of 60:40 of the share price. All the participants accepted this proposal unanimously. He stressed the issue of implementation of the proposed agenda in the declaration.

Prabhat Tirki, West Bengal, pointed out that the problems were the same everywhere in the world under the WTO policies. He thanked the organizers, especially the Centre for Education and Communication, for facilitating the conference. He took note of CEC's earlier fact-finding exercise in West Bengal that brought the attention of the State government on the conditions of the workers in the tea estates. Workers in closed tea gardens were now getting a sum of Rs 500 per month from the State government, under the Food for Work Programme. He thanked all the delegates, both national and international, for making the meeting a success.

The chair thanked Prabhat Tirki and invited Vinod Kumar to deliver the vote of thanks.

Vinod Kumar, Joint Secretary, LPF, thanked the organizers, speakers, trade unions, and small growers from all the participating countries and States in India, and the CEC for conducting the conference. Ashok Ghosh added a vote of thanks to the trade unions for organizing the event and to the members of CEC — J. John, Rinju Rasaily, Sindhu Menon, Devan, and others — for making the International Tea Conference and the International Tea Day successful. The participants resolved to observe International Tea Day in the following years.

Follow-up Actions

The conference decided to follow up the International Tea Day campaign and use the declaration as an instrument of advocacy and implementation. The follow-up activities chalked out in the conference subsume the following areas.

- Exchange of tea workers between Asia and Africa to visit plantations
- Building strong national coalitions and campaigns to raise issues in the declaration
- Lobbying governments, growers, companies, trade unions, etc. in trade in tea producing and consuming countries
- Creating awareness of Tea Day and its objectives among international, national, and local NGOs, trade justice networks, fair-trade organizations, trade policy makers, companies, and consumers
- Dealing with the aspects of the declaration relating to labour rights, health and safety, and women's rights at a national level
- Formation of an International Advisory Group
- Preparation of a briefing to call for a commodity agreement on tea
- Production of materials for national, regional, and international Tea Justice Campaign
- Fund raising and mobilization of resources
- Plans for Tea Day 2006 in Sri Lanka

The conference also explored the possibility of a solidarity campaign on tea with the support and participation of all concerned organizations and the creation of an International Tea Commission for commodity agreement on tea.

Useful Links

www.cec-india.org, www.justtea.org, www.labourfile.org

New Delhi Declaration on the Rights of Tea Workers and Small Growers

December 15, 2005

Recognising that the tea sector, among the highest employment provider, sustains more than 10 million people as workers, majority women, and small growers globally;

Acknowledging that these are located in the developing countries, which are most vulnerable to the current forms of global trade;

Recognising that tea, along with other tree top crops like coffee, cocoa, rubber, is the major foreign exchange earner for some of the producing countries;

Recognising that tea workers, in many countries, are emigrant population of different ethnicities and religious minorities from most vulnerable sections of society, and small growers are subsistent farmers;

Acknowledging that there is disproportionate value accrual at the higher end of the value chain which is never passed on to the consumers and producers and workers;

Realizing that the concentration of power by brands and retailers is increasing the deprivation and vulnerability of the primary producers and workers;

Recognising the unprecedented and prolonged fall in prices of the primary commodity, market manipulation, and in the context of reorganization of the industry and global trade under WTO;

Recognising that the burden of 'crisis' in tea industry is unjustifiably passed on to workers and small growers, which is not reflected in the profitability of the industry;

Realizing that the governments are abdicating their responsibilities in the regulation of production, pricing of tea and the welfare of workers and small growers;

Believing that the tea industry can sustain its workers and producers and acknowledging the need for a global response;

In continuation with the international meetings of tea workers and small growers held in Mumbai (January 2004) and Porto Allegre (January 2005), The tea worker and small grower representatives from Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam assembled at Hotel Hill View Surajkund, (December 13-14, 2005) deliberated on the worsening situation of tea workers and small growers and arrived at the following declaration;

1. Women in Tea Plantation

- a. The exclusions and extreme exploitations of women workers, who constitute more than 50 percent of the workforce in the tea sector, shall be stopped forthwith.
- b. Women workers should have equal wages and service conditions and equal opportunities in all negotiations and decision making processes.
- c. All the decisions taken by the trade unions as well as tripartite fora should be gender-sensitive and they should promote women's leadership at all levels of decision making.
- d. Special effort should be made to ensure education of women and girl children.
- e. Employment and income security for women workers should be protected.
- f. Specific problems as relates to women such as sexual harassment should be firmly dealt with.
- g. Plantation should stop the use of harmful weedicides and herbicides which affect the health of women workers.
- h. We affirm that the women tea workers have the control of their reproductive rights.
- i. Government should establish gender health desk to address gender issues.

2. Wages

- a. We affirm the principle of living wages.

- b. In no situation should the wages be less than the minimum wages, which should not be linked to prices of tea; the increase in wages/ allowance linked to cost of living should be ensured.
- c. We affirm that the collective bargaining and tripartite negotiation as the basis for wage determination-
- d. The process of wage determination should be scientific, democratic, participatory and transparent.
- e. Equal wage for men and women for equal work.
- f. The industry shall not reduce negotiated wages and other benefits.
- g. The employers and the state should desist from and prevent the increasing non-compliance of statutory obligations, benefits and rights.

3. Social Security

- a. The right of joint ownership/ownership to homestead land of tea workers is essential to remove all vestiges of unfreedom from the tea gardens.
- b. In the current context of increasing insecurity, social security mechanism of tea garden workers should be strengthened, and for this purpose special agencies, implementation mechanism and a fund, be created and in the implementation and monitoring of which, trade unions be involved.
- c. The small growers and their workers (including migrant and local) should be brought within the social security net.
- d. There should be improvement and not any attempt to deny or dilute the existing social security measures, including to those under outsourcing or sub-contracted agencies.

4. Employment Security

- a. Considering the increasing instances of closures, abandonment and diversification of tea estates and factories, in many countries, government should establish
 - i. tripartite regulatory mechanisms for the closure of gardens

- ii. institutional support for workers takeover through workers' cooperative with state assistance
- iii. rehabilitation of displaced workers into decent working situations
- b. The sub-leasing, contracting and subcontracting of land and other assets in tea gardens should be stopped forthwith. The workers in the sub-leased or contracted-out gardens and out-growers should get all the benefits as applicable to regular workers. The principal employer should be responsible for the wages and social security of the existing sub-leased, contracted-out gardens and out-growers.

5. Labour Rights

- a. We reaffirm that the trade union rights are the universal human rights which should be respected by all.
 - i. Right to organise and collective bargaining including right to strike
 - ii. Elimination of child labour
 - iii. No discrimination of any form, particularly based on gender, caste, ethnicity and religion
 - iv. No forced labour
- b. These are the basic human rights which are articulated under the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work.
- c. Trade union rights should not be violated under any circumstances.
- d. We affirm the principle of Decent Work and standards as defined by the ILO.

6. Workers' International Interests

- a. We call upon the governments and international agencies (UNCTAD & FAO) to facilitate the creation of an International Tea Commission to promote and strengthen the tea industry, with specific provisions to protect the interests of tea workers and small growers.
- b. Any multi-lateral/regional/bi-lateral agreement among the tea growing countries should have inbuilt provisions and mechanisms to protect and promote the interests of tea workers of the member countries.

- c. The tea producing governments should not encourage trade policies including tariff reduction, resulting in unethical and unhealthy competitiveness among these countries and large-scale unemployment.

7. Tea Small Growers

- a. The tea small growers should get remunerative prices for green leaf, which ensures decent livelihood.
- b. Government should extend support and subsidy to the small tea growers.
- c. Fixation of price of green leaf should be scientific, transparent and with the involvement of small growers.
- d. Not to encourage child labour either directly or concealed under family employment.
- e. The formation of association of small growers and strengthening the existing ones – locally, nationally and internationally is to be encouraged.
- f. The small growers should be encouraged to explore alternative market intervention strategies.
- g. Small tea growers should have a separate authority.
- h. It is desired that the small growers have share in the company to which they sell their leaf/ participate in the management of companies.

8. Occupational Safety and Health

- a. The tea industry should maintain a safe and hygienic working environment and enterprises should provide free and appropriate protective clothing and equipment in accordance with the health and safety standards as prescribed under law and/or agreements, and relevant ILO Convention so as to ensure the protection of the workers, the community and the consumers.
- b. Regular health monitoring of workers engaged in handling of chemicals should be done.
- c. Those handling agro chemicals should be adequately trained in storage, application and disposal. Information in this regard should be

provided to the workers in the local language.

- d. In the use of toxic or carcinogenic pesticides and chemicals and protection of the environment, the producers should conform to the prescribed international standards (WHO-I).
- e. The Maximum Residue Levels should be observed to protect the interests of the consumers and be subjected to a uniform international standard that should be established by an appropriate international agency.

9. General

- a. The State should create effective regulatory and monitoring authority for tea and other similarly placed primary commodities.
- b. Respective governments should support and render financial assistance towards rejuvenation and re-plantation of tea bushes so as to increase productivity.

10. The Next Steps Resolutions

- a. The International Tea Conference calls upon the entire working people, small commodity producers and consumers to extend their support and solidarity to the tea workers and small tea growers in realising the objectives, demands and proposals contained in this declaration.
- b. This Conference further resolves to carry on an effective campaign, as deemed fit in each country, in order to realise these objectives and ~~take these up in the appropriate~~ *fora* including the respective governments for achieving the contents of the declaration.
- c. We reaffirm the call of the International Tea Day on December 15 and resolve to observe it in the subsequent years.

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Annexure I

PRESS RELEASE

International Conference of Tea Workers and Small Growers Demands International Tea Commission

Tea workers and small growers from 11 tea producing countries from Africa, South Asia and East Asia called for the constitution of an International Tea Commission to promote and strengthen the tea industry, which will have specific provisions to protect the interests of tea workers and small growers.

This demand is part of the outcome of a two day international tea conference held in Surajkund, near Delhi from December 13-14, 2005 as a prelude to the observance of first International Tea Day on December 15, 2005.

The call for the observance of the International Tea Day has brought together, for the first time in history, representatives of tea workers and small growers from the tea producing countries Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. Representatives from the Congress of Indonesia Union alliance, Indonesia; Mpanga Growers Tea Factory, Uganda; Tanzania Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union, Tanzania; Joint Plantation Trade Union Centre, Sri Lanka, Nepal Small Tea Farmers association, Nepal; Kenya Small Tea Farmers' Association, Kenya; Tea Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union, Malawi and Vietnam National Union of Agriculture and Rural Workers, Vietnam were among the delegates attended the tea conference. From India representatives from the AITUC, BMS, HMS, UTUC, AICCTU and NTUI participated in the tea conference.

Tea, a tree top crop from the plant *Camellia Sinensis*, was historically grown in plantations as large mono-crop agricultural systems in the subtropical colonies using non-European workers by the European capital, technology and managerial skill for the European market. A major shift has occurred in this system of production, whereby in major tea producing countries Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam, most of the production of tea is by small growers. In India too, since last two decades, small tea growers have come as a major force and they contribute around 20 per cent of the total production of about 850 million kg of tea in the country.

The emergence of this business model, which is cheaper and more efficient, could be a reason for the reorganization of major tea companies in the world, whereby, in a major shakeup, they are disengaging from primary commodity production and concentrating on building 'brands' and engaging in 'retailing', where the profitability is at the highest. The situation where the global demand of tea is not increasing has created a condition of apparent glut; and it has pushed the global commodity prices into a downward spin resulting in the closure and abandonment of many tea plantations as well as the non-viability of small growers. This has increased the vulnerability and threatened the food security of millions of workers in the tea plantations, majority women, and emigrant population of different ethnicities and religious minorities from most vulnerable sections of society, and of the subsistent small growers all over the world.

Under the compulsions from the World Trade Organization, the governments of the tea producing countries are removing tariffs and allowing import of tea, resulting in competition among the producing countries and overall fall in tea prices. Further, the free market fundamentalism of WTO does not permit multilateral macro economic intervention to control production and address price realization problems to the advantage of the corporate brands and retailers of tea.

The International Tea conference was an attempt by tea workers and small growers from all over the world to understand and address this problem from their perspective.

The Declaration demands that the tea producing governments should not encourage trade policies including tariff reduction, resulting in unethical and unhealthy competitiveness among these countries or unemployment.

It affirms the principle of living wages and that in no situation should the wages be less than the minimum wages, which should not be linked to prices of tea.

It further call for the 'right of joint ownership/ownership to homestead land of tea workers in order to remove all vestiges of unfreedom from the tea gardens' and for the setting up of special agencies, implementation mechanism and a fund, be created and in the implementation and monitoring of social security for tea workers in the context of increasing insecurity.

In another demand, to address the increasing instances of closures, abandonment and diversification of tea estates and factories, in many countries, the Declaration calls for the establishment of tripartite regulatory

mechanisms for the closure of gardens, institutional support for workers takeover through workers' cooperative with state assistance and the rehabilitation of displaced workers into decent working situations.

The Declaration calls for the immediate action to stop the exclusions and extreme exploitations of women workers, who constitute more than 50 percent of the workforce in the tea sector and demand the protection of their employment and income security. It also calls for the setting up of 'gender health desk' to address gender issues.

The Declaration addressed the issue of the protection of the health of the workers, the community and the consumers by maintaining a safe and hygienic working environment in accordance with the health and safety standards as prescribed under law and/or agreements, and relevant ILO Convention.

The Declaration affirms the principle of Decent Work and standards as defined by the ILO and reaffirms that the trade union rights are the universal human rights which should be respected by all.

Emphasising that tea small growers should get remunerative prices for green leaf, which ensures decent livelihood, the Declaration calls for the setting up of a separate authority for the small tea growers and that the fixation of price of green leaf should be scientific, transparent and with the involvement of small growers.

The International Tea Conference reaffirmed the call of the International Tea Day on December 15 and resolved to observe it in the subsequent years. It also resolved to carry on an effective campaign, as deemed fit in each country, in order to realise the objectives and take these up in the appropriate fora including the respective governments for achieving the contents of the declaration.

J John
Centre for Education and Communication, New Delhi
On behalf of the International Tea Conference

New Delhi
December 15, 2005

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Annexure II

Newspaper Reports

THE HINDU

Date: 16/12/2005 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/12/16/stories/2005121605531500.htm>

National

Global body to promote tea industry sought

Staff Correspondent

International body demands protection of the interests of workers and growers

- *Call to popularise consumption in India*
- *Delhi Declaration adopted while fixing minimum wages for workers*
- *Governments seen to be abdicating responsibilities*

New Delhi: Tea workers, small growers and trade union representatives from India and 11 other tea-producing countries gathered here on Thursday for an International Conference of Tea Workers and Small Growers. The conference was organised by the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) on the occasion of the International Tea Day. Participants called for the constitution of an International Tea Commission to promote the industry with specific provisions to protect the interests of workers and small growers.

The Indian trade unions present were the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Tharapiya Mazdoor Sangh (TMS), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), Trade Union Organisation Committee (TUOC), United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) and United Trade Union Centre (Amnabaran) (UTUC-AB).

Addressing the conference, West Bengal Labour Minister Mohannad Anan said the Preamble Labour Act 1951 was not applicable to small tea gardens. He said while engaged in tea gardens around the world should get adequate pay and social security.

Law Commission

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thehindu/scripts/print.pl?file=2005121605531500.htm&date=20051216&sqid=666>

16/12/2005

Member of Parliament from Tea, selling Dawa Malhotra said tea industry in Darjeeling employed over 35,000 permanent employees and an additional 200,000 workers in the plucking season.

Josephine Barla, Member of Parliament from Alipondur, said tea needed to be popularised in India, as the per capita consumption was still very low.

J. John, Director of CEC, said both small growers and plantation were affected by falling prices that were threatening the security and livelihood of workers. The Delhi Declaration adopted stressed that in no situation should the wages of workers be less than the minimum wage, which should not be linked to prices of tea.

Pointing out that the burden of the 'crisis' in the industry was unjustifiably passed on to workers and small growers, it said that governments of tea producing countries were abdicating their responsibilities in the regulation of production and pricing of tea and the welfare of workers and small growers.

The Declaration asked for women to be given equal wages and service conditions and equal opportunities in all negotiations and decision-making processes.

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Tea Day focus on workers' rights

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Calcutta Telegraph (India)

Jalpaiguri, Dec. 15: Equal wages for men and women, no reduction in negotiated wages and no curtailment of fringe benefits. These are some of the demands that featured in a joint declaration on tea workers' rights made today by Indian trade unions along with their counterparts in different tea-producing nations like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Small tea growers were also represented.

The declaration was made at a two-day seminar convened in Delhi to mark the International Tea Day, observed for the first time today.

"We feel that women workers should be paid the same wage as men," said Samir Roy, the state secretary of Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Roy was speaking over phone from Delhi.

The five-page declaration also raises, among others, issues like distribution of free clothing and appropriate equipment to workers that meet health and safety standards, regular health monitoring of labourers and improvement of amenities in the gardens.

The representatives also expressed concern over the use of toxic and carcinogenic pesticides in tea estates and said the norms laid down by World Health Organisation should be followed in this matter.

Trade union leaders and foreign representatives advocated that both the planters and labourers in the small tea growers' sector should be brought under the purview of social security legislation.

"It was also mentioned in the joint declaration that the process of fixing the price of green leaf ought to be transparent. Subsidy and support should be extended by the government and small growers should have a separate monitoring authority," said Bijoygopal Chakrabarty, the convener of United Forum of Small Tea Growers' Associations, an apex body of small tea growers in north Bengal.



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