



Press Release

The Independent People's Tribunal on World Bank Group

New Delhi, 13 September 2007:

On 21 September 2007, hundreds of people will assemble in New Delhi to put the World Bank on trial. In four days of parallel sessions in front of more than a dozen judges, people from all walks of life will air their grievances against one of the world's most powerful institutions. In convening an Independent People's Tribunal on the World Bank in India, they are attempting to do more than simply rally another protest against injustice.

Introducing the Independent People's Tribunal on World Bank Group, Ms. Deepika D'Souza, Member of the World Bank Tribunal Secretariat and Executive Director of the Human Rights Law Network, pointed out that the Tribunal is political strategy, aimed at renewing a silenced national debate over neoliberalism and economic policy. Internationally, this Tribunal is creating critical dialogue at exactly the time the World Bank is being re-assessed from all quarters, including from within. Finally, it is a direct assault on one of the Bank's (and the elite's) most powerful tools: the monopoly of knowledge. "By bringing into the limelight the testimony and personal experiences of the poor, Adivasis, Dalits, women, and other marginalised people, it is in direct conflict with the World Bank's own means of understanding economic and social policy," asserted Mr. Prashant Bhushan, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India and a prominent human rights activist.

Mr. Arun Kumar, an Eminent Economist and Professor at JNU, said that for instance, for public finance, we now depend on the World Bank to tell us what to do and we accept it uncritically even though many of the suggestions are not relevant for us. "Government of India changed its economic policies under the pressure and influence of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to another kind of globalisation. These market principles pushed by the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank are having a cascading effect on our production and employment," he pointed out.

Mr. Prashant Bhushan, said that the revolving door between financial firms, the US government and the World Bank, raised a disturbing question about the legitimacy, advisability and appropriateness of allowing senior policy-making officials of the Indian government to immediately take up post-retirement jobs with the World Bank or with global 'consultants' at exorbitant salaries, or inviting persons who have been working with them to occupy senior policy-making positions in the government. "Persons who have been working with organisations which have vested interests that may be opposed to the economic interests of the country, should not be called in to occupy policy-making positions in the government of India," Mr. Bhushan pointed out.

Mr. Ashok Chaudhary, General Secretary of the Gramin Mazdoor Union Uttar Pradesh, asserted that through their draconian policies the World Bank and the institutions supported by it were

destroying the livelihoods of the traditional forest dwellers and Adivasis. "Such policies are also displacing the people who have traditional rights over the forest lands. Not only this, the World Bank policies are also damaging the socio-cultural fabric of the marginalised people," he added.

Mr. Devinder Sharma, India's prominent food security expert, said that the World Bank has influenced Indian farming directly and indirectly in numerous ways, starting from the Green Revolution era. "The WB continues to influence the directions that Indian farming takes even now, if not by anything else, just the sheer magnitude of financing that goes into the agriculture sector," he added.

According to him, the World Bank has influenced Indian agriculture in a variety of ways – some directly and some indirectly. The direct influence through special projects designed to change agricultural technologies, inputs pertaining to those technologies, institutions created (or dismantled) around agriculture etc., could have been at the state level or at the national level. In terms of indirect influences, critical are structural adjustment/ (economic) re-structuring projects. Therefore, the World Bank is accused of directly and indirectly contributing to the agrarian distress and farmers' suicides and indebtedness in India today. Its model of farming is be mainly pro-corporate and this de-facto had become terribly anti-farmer in India.

The overall point of view of the speakers was that the World Bank policies have an impact on the life of every Indian through the privatisation of public good and services. "The World Bank is promoting the pure logic of the market over all other human values, which is becoming visible in every sector, might it be agriculture, services, the environment or human rights," said Prof Arun Kumar of JNU.

According to the organisers, the trend toward private provision, at a macroeconomic level, can contribute to unequal and politically volatile societies. Although increased private investment can upgrade national infrastructure, introduce new technology, and provide employment; it can also lead to the establishment of a two-tiered service supply with a corporate segment focused on the healthy and wealthy and an under-financed public sector focusing on the poor and sick; brain drain, with better trained medical practitioners and educators being drawn toward the private sector; and a powerful private sector that can threaten the role of the government as the primary duty bearer for human rights by subverting regulatory systems through political pressure or the co-opting of regulators.

Given what seems to be the record of the projects funded and promoted by the World Bank in terms of human rights violations and environmental degradation; the feeble response of these agencies and the Indian government to proposals and appeals by the people of India to reconsider its projects and approaches, it is time to examine and judge their claims to serving the wider public interest. The chief focus of this tribunal will be to study the impact of the World Bank's policies and projects as it is increasing its influence in all directions encompassing the country's economy as well as its educational, social and cultural fabric.

From the 21 to 24 September 2007, a 15-member Jury, which includes Arundhati Roy, Aruna Roy, former SC Judge PB Sawant and Amit Bhaduri, will render judgments on the validity, utility and effectiveness of the World Bank policies and projects.

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