



Media Update

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PRESS RELEASE



International
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Organization

Call to Empower Workers of Fishery and Agriculture Sector

Hyderabad, 26 March 2015 (ILO News): Pakistan has inched forward towards the realization of International Labour Organization (ILO) convention 11 of 1921. Though the convention 11 was ratified by British regime in 1923, the same was inherited by Government of Pakistan in 1947. Government of Sindh after the 18th Constitutional Amendment has taken the lead to enact Sindh Industrial Relations Act-2013 (SIRA-2013) which for the first time has recognized the Agriculture and Fishery workers as industrial workers. The agriculture and fishery workers have thus earned the freedom and the right to associate, form trade unions and collectively bargain with their employers, who are the small, medium and big landlords within the Sindh province. An ILO convention usually calls upon the ratifying states to enact national laws and practices and to report on its compliance at regular intervals. SIRA, therefore, is a welcome legislation that will gradually promote social justice by enabling agriculture workers to claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate. This was revealed in an awareness raising seminar on “Sindh Industrial Relations Act 2013” organized by Sindh Department of labour, International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UN-Women in Hyderabad on Tuesday. The seminar unfolded the salient features of the SIRA in an easy language for the peasants and *harris* who





had come to attend the seminar from the Mirpurkhas and Dadu districts. Others among the audience were the enforcement machinery comprising the district administrations, representatives of the judiciary, police and the agriculture, fisheries, livestock and poultry departments. Civil society representatives, academia and the media persons also attended the seminar.

The Joint Director Labour-Sindh explained in detail the rights promised vide various clauses of SIRA to the agricultural workers, process of trade union registration, grievance redressal procedures, and powers vested in the Registrar of Trade unions for the settlement of Industrial Disputes through this Act.

Representatives of the worker and employer federations welcomed the legislation and offered their support in creating further awareness about the enacted law and promoting unionization and association in the pursuit of social justice. Mr. Waqar Ahmed Memon, Regional Chairman of the Pakistan Workers' Federation (PWF) stressed the need for creating congenial and bilaterally beneficial relations among the *harris* and the landlords for increasing the productivity and thus the economy. Syed Adil Hussain Shah while speaking on behalf of the employers federation of Pakistan informed that the EFP has already started the process of assessing the needs of the employers-landlords regarding formation of employer associations under the SIRA. EFP would thereafter start the process of forming the employer associations in Mirpurkhas and Dadu districts. He urged that the provincial government should replicate the process of forming employer associations in other districts of Sindh as well.

Mr. Abid Niaz Khan of the ILO stressed the need for effective implementation of the SIRA, The principle of freedom of association is at the core of the ILO's work; it is enshrined in the ILO Constitution (1919), the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia (1944), and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998). It is also a right proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The right to organize and form employers' and workers' organizations is the prerequisite for sound collective bargaining and social dialogue. Article 17-A of the Constitution of Pakistan also extends this right to every citizen, but the social scenario is regrettably controvert, which need to be reverted in the interest of the labourers particularly the agriculture labourers who are mostly women.

Mr. Asim Jaleel National Project Coordinator UN-Women recommended that home-based workers should also be recognized as formal labourers, so that they could also be brought under the social security and worker welfare schemes. He called upon the Sindh Government to listen to the demand of



more than 2 million women home-based workers, who are being exploited by commission agents and are forced to work in hazardous conditions just because of the absence of laws. Government of Pakistan being signatory to various pro-women international covenants and treaties must expeditiously take concrete measures for enacting the national laws for protecting its own citizens. He also urged the Pakistan government to ratify convention 177 of the ILO.

Mr. Ali Ashraf of the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), expressed hope that SIRA awareness will be expanded by the Department of Labour in the other districts of Sindh also, so that the unjust and inhuman labour conditions could be positively impacted. He also requested the enforcers to enforce SIRA in its letter and spirit. FAO is the lead agency coordinating a One-UN project which is funded by the United Nation Trust Fund for human Security. ILO and UN-Women are the other UN agencies responsible for the project implementation. The SIRA awareness seminar was jointly arranged by the UN agencies in realization of the fact that despite the lapse of two years after enactment of SIRA, neither the government functionaries nor the *harris* and communities were aware of it.

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