

CONCEPT NOTE

WORKSHOP: MARCH FOR JUSTICE IN INDIA. ONE YEAR AFTER -WHAT'S NEXT ?



**Friday 6 December 2013 , World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland
Organised by Ekta Europe**

Jan Satyagraha (March for Justice), a non-violent mass mobilisation, was launched in India on 2 October 2012. Around 70'000 adivasis, landless labourers and small farmers, marched for nine days and finally saw their claims for basic rights to land, shelter and livelihood recognised by the Indian government. Jairam Ramesh, Minister for Rural Development, stood in front of the marchers in Agra on 11 October and signed a 10-point agreement with the activist organisations, led by Ekta Parishad. A tremendous achievement: it showed the strength and effectiveness of democratic, organised, non-violent struggle, with support from international networks, in the face of enormous opposition.

The agreement marked the culmination of a long campaign by Ekta Parishad and many attempts to have a result-oriented dialogue with national and state governments. In 2007 the first national march took place, Janadesh (March for Land), mobilising 25 000 people who walked from Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh to Delhi. It built on many years of grassroots organisation by Ekta Parishad and resulted in the creation of a Land Commission, who submitted an encompassing proposal for land reform. However, no action on the part of government was taken until Jansatyagraha. About 70 per cent of the points in the signed agreement had been put in place by mid-2013.

General elections will take place in India in 2014. Therefore it is vital to keep up pressure on the government to follow up on all the promises made in the 2012 agreement, and to ensure that land rights will be at the heart of the election campaign. To this end Ekta Parishad has launched the slogan « No land, no vote! First land, then vote! ». And it is working hard to raise awareness among its grassroots membership and to dialogue with many other activist organisations and with a range of political players in India.

Ekta Parishad is also cooperating with activist networks at the European and global levels and creating

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links with other struggles around land rights, promoting the idea of non-violence. The aim is to generate additional pressure from the outside on the Indian elections to ensure respect for the rights of the landless and marginalised. But there are enormous challenges ahead.

It is essential to learn from the actions of Ekta Parishad and the outcome of the most recent march in the broader context of food security and food sovereignty. This analysis can then help to focus and reinforce a coordinated network of support at the European and global level. It should bring together those involved in non-violent struggles, land and housing rights, the eradication of poverty, development of small-scale sustainable agriculture, and the empowerment of women.

Ekta Europe, a loose network of small NGOs and individuals, has been in existence since 2002 in order to support Ekta Parishad. This support included the organisation of an international conference on land and livelihoods in September 2011 in Geneva, which raised awareness and support for Jan Satyagraha in 2012. Having played an important role in communications and fundraising during the preparations for Jan Satyagraha and in the 10 years before, the affiliated organisations of Ekta Europe represent the visions of Ekta Parishad in Europe and translate it into a range of local activities. After 10 years of existence, Ekta Europe is assessing its own achievements in supporting Ekta Parishad, and asking how it can become more effective, broader-based and better coordinated in its support for the struggle of the landless poor.

A one-day workshop to take place in Geneva on 6 December 2013 has two major goals:

- to learn from the actions of Ekta Parishad, especially the achievements of Jan Satyagraha, and to present Ekta Parishad's strategies for 2014 and onwards in a broader context of land reform and food sovereignty;
- to strengthen the Ekta Europe network and to build further support for Ekta Parishad in the coming years with a focus on advocacy at the national and international level and an interest in non-violence approaches..

The specific objectives of the workshop are:

- to share the lessons learned by Ekta Parishad through Jan Satyagraha, to understand the strategy of Ekta Parishad for the years to come, and to place its work in a global context of land rights;
- to share information about Ekta Parishad and the changes that are taking place in the organisation as a result of leadership change;
- to strengthen and intensify the communication between Ekta Europe and the leading activists of Ekta Parishad through a direct exchange, and to plan the Ekta Europe response to Ekta Parishad needs in terms of communications, advocacy, fundraising, volunteers...;
- to inform interested partners of the supporting activities of Ekta Europe, strengthen the Ekta Europe network and expand its membership.

We count on your presence at this workshop and your support for Ekta Parishad: let's get organised !

Important: The regular Ekta Europe meeting will be held on the weekend following the Friday workshop. It will be open to people and organisations who might want to join the Ekta Europe network. You are most welcome!

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