



State wide Protest against violation of Forest Rights Act 2006 in Orissa

Monday, November 02, 2009

Bhubaneswar: Raising the concerns over the violation of Forest Right Act implementation in Orissa, the members of the CSD (Campaign for Survival and Dignity), Orissa today dated 2nd November 2009 organized a State Level Press meet at Red Cross Bhawan at 2 p.m. CSD (Campaign for Survival and Dignity), Orissa is a coalition of grassroots and tribal organizations across Orissa and is one of the major forces behind the passage of the ever historic Forest Rights Act, 2006 in India, is currently working to ensure that the letter and spirit of this law is implemented. Forest dwellers from different districts including Pradip Prabhu (National convener, CSD) and Gopinath Majhi, (State Convener CSD) along with important members and personalities addressed the media. Welcoming the representatives of the media, the state Convenor, Gopinath Mahji shared the objective of the Press Conference. He said that the objective of the today's Press meet is to challenge the Govt. of Orissa over the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the State. He said that the Tribal Ministry, Govt. of India has called a meeting in Delhi of all State Chief Ministers, Forest Ministers and Tribal Ministers on November 4th, 5th and 6th to review the implementation of FRA. He also informed that even he Govt. of Orissa has convened a meeting on 30th October, 2009 and has reported that till date, out of the 3,04,509 individual claims filed at the Gram sabha level, only 55, 000 individual forest land pattas have been distributed and that only to the ST forest dwellers and the claims of the Other Traditional Forest Dwellers have not been considered. Beside, there is a vast gap of the amount of land being occupied and claimed by the forest dwellers and the pattas which have been distributed to them. He also said that whatever pattas have been distributed mostly belong to the revenue forest category and claims in the other forest categories i.e as reserved forest, Proposed reserved forest and sanctuary have not been covered.

The National Convener, CSD Pradeep Prabhu addressing the media informed that while the Forest Rights Act gives to the forest dwellers rights over the forest recognizing their community forest resources including community forest rights i.e grazing, MFP collection, rights over water bodies and nistar rights etc. the Govt. of India and also Govt. of all the states including Orissa is just taking the Forest Rights Act as forest land distribution scheme and not considering the larger community forest rights. He also informed that while forest rights Act, 2006 totally disregard the current forest protection and management system through JFM(VSS) in which Forest Department play a divisive role in the village community and the Act is very clearly empowered the Gram Sabha/ village community to protect their forest, wildlife and biodiversity and have provision to form Forest Protection Committees at the Gram sabha level, the Govt. of Orissa is violating the constitutional rights for the forest dwellers by not banning the JFM/VSS and by not recognizing the community forest rights. Beside, the forest department which has been the hurdle of the forest dwellers still evicting the forest dwellers through its plantation programme under different foreign based projects like JBIC, OTELP, FDA, Compensatory Plantation etc. He also said that in these forestry programmes many NGOs at different level involved and are diluting the spirit of the forest rights Act with the Government.

The state convener, Gopinath Majhi also informed the media that the CSD, Orissa is going to stage Protest Rally tomorrow dated 3rd November at Lower PMG of the State Capital raising all above concerns including the update problems identified during the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the State. i.e

1. The SDLC did not undertake any training/awareness/distribution of forms.
2. As the SDLC did not provided training s to the FRCs members and it decided over the claims avoiding the decision of the Gram Sabha. SDLC/DLC did not intimate claimants about their decisions. Rejected claimants not intimated about the rejection and reasons for rejection to enable them to appeal against the decision.
3. The PRI representatives in the SDLC/DLC are ignored by the Govt. in the process of implementation.
4. Forms for community forest rights/CFRs not given/not filled/not verified.
5. Despite the FRC intimating the forest department about field verification, forest officials did not come. Illegal eviction of forest land occupants before their claims have been considered
6. Official records/documents for use as evidence not provided when requested.
7. Harassment/punishment of those collecting MFPs. Not handing over the ownership rights to the community over KL/Bamboo (Sunabeda Sanctuary)
8. Diversion of forest land for mining and other projects without recognition of forest rights and consent of Gram sabha.
9. PTG rights to community tenure over their habitat and seasonal rights of nomadic/pastoral communities totally ignored.

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