

To,

Narendra Modi,
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India,
Prime Minister's Office,
South Block, Raisina Hill,
New Delhi-110011

**Open letter to the Prime Minister
Demand for urgent action to provide social protection to all unorganized
laborers and the most vulnerable.**

Covid-19 response

Dear Sir,

As India grapples with the spread of the novel corona virus, or COVID-19, the government has come out with lots of measures to prevent the spread of the virus. More and more companies are asking their employees to work from home. Sports events have been cancelled, colleges and universities closed down, and public gatherings restricted. We appreciate all initiatives taken by public health departments and the government. The written media and the visual media and social media are engaged full time in bringing awareness to the public and to prevent and safe guard oneself and the community. But missing from all of these measures are steps that provide relief to workers of the unorganized sector, who make up almost 92% of the total workforce and who have no other options. In the absence of universal social protection for all workers and their families, especially for the workers in the unorganized sectors, they are left with no alternatives and still largely go about their work.

The daily-wage laborers who live hand-to-mouth existence, food delivery agents, cab drivers, security guards, contract sanitary workers and scavenging workers have to take all the risks. These cannot work from home nor can they afford to stay home for several days, weeks or months, for one never knows when things will be normal. A farm worker who lives by the seasonal agriculture cannot be staying at home; he or she has to go to the field to get a daily wage to feed the family. Domestic workers, construction workers or internal migrant workers need to risk their life to feed their family and to keep themselves and their dependents from deprivation. There are already cases of domestic workers acquiring the virus from their employers and many of them were asked to go on leave without any pay or compensation.

As we all know there are 8,000 children dying of hunger every day. The unorganized workers staying home will mean the number of deaths by hunger will be more than the deaths by Covid 19. There are a number of governments who have taken lots of social protection measures including allocating large sums of money to meet out the social protection of their population. Waiving of interest for the credit received by borrowers, making available food to the needy, postponing the EMIs for the loan they have

received, providing financial support for self-employed who have to close their small business extended temporary unemployment allowances, etc... Spain has decided to bring all of its' private health providers and facilities into public control as the spread of COVID-19 continues to grip the country. Final year medical students are made to engage and coordinate with companies capable of producing medical equipments. The US, President Donald Trump and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin proposed mailing out checks of up to \$1,000 to American adults. Such an economic-aid package was overwhelmingly passed by the House of Representatives. It is a pity that the government of India has not boosted its disaster management fund at this dire need or announced any other economic support to the poor who are losing their jobs.

The poor and the people living in slums who hardly have a space to walk between their neighbors' doors cannot afford to be isolated. The preventive and sanitary measures proposed and advised by the government will be difficult to put into practice for millions of people. Almost all of them are daily wage earners who make their life by casual work: vegetable vendors, street vendors, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers or persons doing all kinds of odd jobs to make ends meet. The sensitizing measures advised by the government, do not get through to this large population who need to be supported with a minimum existential economic social protection. We still wait until the rulers understand this and come out with definite plans with proactive plans that take into account the vast majority of the population, precarious workers in the unorganized sectors and their families. Instead of waiving of millions of rupees to the corporate and big companies, a few million will help these vulnerable people to meet their daily needs at a time right now. Some of the State Governments have already initiated certain measures, like the UP government who announced Rs.15,000 assistance to all poor families and the Kerala Government announced assistance to families not eligible for pensions or employment guarantee schemes.

The Poor cannot work from home; they now face the biggest risks to their health and income.

Hence we request to Hon'ble Prime Minister, **to take necessary action by way of providing social protection to all, especially to the most vulnerable unorganized laborers. In the short term, during the Covid 19 crisis, we request a minimum of rs.20,000 to be sent to all adults of the vulnerable population in India.**

Since this is not an ordinary disaster, we need to address it not only for now, but we have to ensure all vulnerable population to have access to social protection for their life time. It is time that comprehensive and adequate social protection measures are taken by the government to ensure social protection for all. We therefore also request you to involve all the trade unions and other relevant and representative organizations to join and ensure the delivery of social protection schemes and measures to the door steps of the people. The call of the ILO, that the benefits of economic progress should reach all, has to be answered right now.

As we appreciate all measures taken by the government to deal with this COVID-19, we hope the above requests are taken up as an emergency need by the parliament session which is now in progress. In the Indian context where the health and nutrition services are inadequate, employment is precarious and large number of people living with hunger such a crisis we need to reach the unreached. It is these most marginalized; the poor and the unorganized, living in slums and those who are outside the social security safety nets. All our efforts need to be made to ensure that the above measures reach them. We hope the response can be such that it sets in motion efforts in creating a more equitable and sustainable health care and social protection system.

Thanking you for a definite action you would take to our suggestion.

Yours hopefully.

L.A Samy, Steering Committee member ANRSP,

Asian Network for Right to Social Protection-ANRSP, Christian Workers Movement-CWM, National Domestic Workers Movement-NDWM India, Confederation of Free Trade Unions India- CFTUI, International Network for a Human Economy-INHE Asia, Tamil Nadu Land Rights Federation-TBRLF Tamil Nadu Pondicherry, Society of Women in Action for Total Empowerment-SWATE, Water and Livelihood Rights Federation-WLRF, Karur All Labour Union-KADALU, Tamil Nadu Conservancy workers Federation-Chennai.