



Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

C.B.C.I Office for Labour, New Delhi

MAY DAY MESSAGE 2020

A Just Society with Dignity and Equity

“We are united by the struggle for peace and justice”, Pope Francis, Querida Amazonia, no. 109

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

The Labour Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India assures its prayers and all possible support to those who are distressed by the Pandemic Corona Virus. Many of our migrant workers stranded in various parts of the country and across the world are experiencing lots of agony and pain. The Governments, Civil Society, Labour Associations, Migrants Organizations, Church's and religious groups are actively engaged in serving the humanity affected by the COVID 19. We place on record the commendable services rendered by all especially the National and State Governments, Scientists, doctors, nurses, Para-medical staff, security forces, and other service providers.

Towards a Just Society

A just Society with dignity and equity has been the dream of humanity from time immemorial. The Holy Scripture says, “Follow Justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut 16, 20). The mission statement of Jesus reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed”(Lk 4,18). The Church too reiterates this vision through its document, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” (Justice in the World, Synod of Bishops, 1971).

Efforts to Ensure Labour Standards

Efforts to build a just Society, as Pope Francis states in the *Querida Amazonia*, require a capacity for fraternity, a spirit of human fellowship. It is with this spirit of fellowship and solidarity that the workers all over the world through the International Labour Organization (ILO) has established eight core conventions to ensure the rights of workers. The Social Teachings of the Catholic Church are the timely interventions to uphold the rights and dignity

of workers. The encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, published by Pope Leo XIII, on 15 May 1891 upholds dignity of work, just wage, formation of trade union and collective bargaining to protect the rights of the workers.

The Working Class in India

India has 48.76 crores workers. The workers in India are broadly categorized as organized sector or formal sector and unorganized sector or informal sector. The organized or formal sector includes workers employed by the government, state owned enterprises and private sector enterprises which are licensed. Ninety Four percent of the workers in the country are in the unorganized sector who are deprived of job security, minimum wage, social security and social welfare.

Unemployment

In the context of rampant Globalization and the Neo-liberal economic policies adopted by the Government of India from 1991, the agricultural works and other sections in the informal sector are losing jobs. The bonded labourers and the child workers though banned by law in the country are increasing day by day due to poverty. The trafficking in women and children are the byproduct of the market economy. The NSSO report in 2019 admits that unemployment rate in the country is at the highest in over 45 years.

Impact of Trade Agreements

The recent discussions for a free trade agreement among ten member states of Asean for a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is currently stopped because of the resistance from the farmers and the trade unions in the country. The slogan during the protest was, 'We can ill afford to become a dumping ground'! The far reaching consequences of the agreement to the farmers, shop keepers and small business men of the country is taken in to account by the Government of India while stopping to sign the agreement. To determine the future of the global rules on trade, the 11th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is proposed to happen in June 2020 in Nur- Sultan, Kazakhstan. The proposed agreements will have adverse impact on the farmers, workers and Fishers who are already experiencing the pinch of the market economy.

Impact of Legal and Economic Reforms

A country which could not afford, even after 70 years of independence to ensure minimum wage, social security, occupational safety, health insurance, maternity benefit, pension, job security, etc. is on the process of reforming the labour laws of the country. The remodeling of 44 labour laws of the country in to four labour codes will only support the corporate interests than the interests of workers. The rights to organize, negotiate etc. will be derailed. The workers' right for rest, entertainment, social security and social welfare will be at stake.

The move of the national government to sell the public sector undertakings such as Bharatiya Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), BSNL, IDBI, Indian Railway, Air India, Mines, the defense industry etc. will only make the country an instrument of exploitation by the Multi- National Corporations (MNC's). The job loss in the primary sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishery etc. will make the workers in the rural areas to migrate to the mega cities. The alarming situation is projected by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, "the most vulnerable of these become temporary labourers, and many rural workers end up moving to poverty-stricken urban areas." (Laudato SI, n. 134)

Way Forward

The world haunted by the Pandemic Corona Virus and the global locked down is an occasion for an introspection on the plight of humanity and to look forward to a new development paradigm. A development with a human face where the dignity of labour and value of human life is upheld as Pope Francis puts it, " Yet we can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social and more integral. Liberation from the

dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production, and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation and community”. (Laudato Si, n. 112). Further the Pope reiterates, “All of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution. Science and technology are not neutral; from the beginning to the end of a process, various intentions and possibilities are in play and can take on distinct shapes. Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (Laudato Si, n. 114).

The UN proposal, for Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has become relevant. ‘Decent work for all’, figures prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals (no.8). According to ILO, the four pillars of decent work are productive employment, labour standards, social dialogue and social protection. Productive employment refers to employment that yields sufficient returns to permit the worker and his/her dependents a level of consumption above the poverty line. Decent wage is about paying workers enough so that they can cover the basic costs required for a dignified and healthy life for them and their family.

The Role of Workers India Federation and the CBCI Labour Office

The Workers India Federation (WIF), the instrument of the Labour Office of the Catholic Bishops’ conference of India (CBCI), has the responsibility with the regional Labour Commissions and various fora’ to synergize the rural economy with gender equality. Human Resource Management Policy adopted by the CBCI in 2016 may be ensured in the Catholic institutions. To empower the workers, Regional Commissions may be strengthened giving participation to major work force in the respective regions. All the dioceses may also form Labour Commissions to protect the rights of the workers. The workers enumerated below needs our special attention;

1. Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry: They form 56.6 percent of the work force in the country contributing 14.10 percent of the GDP. The economic survey 2017-18 states that the farm income would reduce 20-25 percent due to the adversities in climate and therefore the urban migration would increase. But the specialized financing from the government with collective farming, value addition, co-operativisation and e-marketing can revitalize agriculture and fishery sectors.

2. Migrant Workers: Due to the failure of the rural economy large numbers of workers are migrating.

a. **Overseas Migrants:** India has 17.5 million overseas migrants. Due to lack of appropriate policy and legislation in India, the migrant workers end up in untold miseries. The Global compact on the safe, orderly and regular migration adopted by UN in 2018 is an instrument for educating the society for safe migration. It is also an instrument for negotiation to the national Government to frame a policy and law to protect the rights of the migrant workers. E-migrate, the web portal introduced by the Government has to be made use by the diocesan commissions to maintain proper data. In the context of the Pandemic, reintegration of migrants is a major concern.

b. **Inter- State Migrants:** There are 45 crore interstate migrants in the country. Proper legislation to protect their rights, safety, welfare and social security is essential. Pre-departure orientation with proper documentation of the outgoing migrants have to be maintained by the labour departments through an e-portal. The receiving states too must have proper data to protect them at different eventualities including disasters.

3. Domestic Workers: As per the ILO estimates there are 4.2 million domestic workers in India. In spite of various international conventions including the ILO convention on ‘Decent work for the domestic workers’ (C.189), there is no legislation to protect the rights of the domestic workers in the country. Various states in the country have moved forward to recognize them as workers and ensure minimum wage, social welfare etc. Attempts on the side of labour commission to protect the rights of the domestic workers as majority of them form female category and the trafficking in women is on the increase has to be effectively done.

4. Construction Workers: The 2.39 percent of the construction workers in India are contributing 13.79 percent share to the GDP. The living condition of the workers and the family members needs to be improved with appropriate social welfare schemes.

5. Other Informal Workers: The daily wage workers in the country comprise 51.15 percent. The living condition of these workers is day by day deteriorating with no proper social protection and social security measures.

6. Apostleship of the Sea (AOS): The Centennial celebration of Apostleship of the sea was to happen this year. Due to the Pandemic Corona Virus the celebration is postponed to next year. But let us remember in prayer thousands of seafarers, passengers and the crews stranded in the ships and ports.

7. Employment of the Youth: Presently India has the largest share of youth population in the world. The unemployment rate of the youth is also growing alarmingly high. We must collaborate with the skill Mission of the State and Central Governments to promote the youth to be efficient work force with suitable skills and competence.

Conclusion: The crass Globalization has stalled the rural economies with heavy loss of income and employment. A slogan emerging from the Civil Society, Human Rights Organizations, Migrants Associations, the Labour organizations and the Trade Unions is that “Our world is not for Sale. Stop Corporate Globalization. Another World is possible.” Let the world rally around the above slogan to create a new world order with dignity and equity.

St. Joseph, the patron of the workers, be our guide and inspiration to enliven the workers’ rights and dignity.

Chairman

Vice Chairman

Vice Chairman

Rt. Rev. Dr. Alex Vadakkumthala

Rt. Rev. Dr. Jose Chittooparambil CMI

Rt. Rev. Dr. Nazarene Soosai

Fr. Eugene H Pereira

Secretary CBCI Office for Labour & Director, Workers India Federation, CBCI Centre,

1 Ashok Place, New Delhi-110001

Mr. Joy Gothuruth

Mr. K. Jesuraja

Mr. Elroy Kiran Crasto

President-WIF

General Secretary-WIF

Treasurer-WIF

www.cbclabour.info Mob: 91-9447461851, Land 011-23344740