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Pakistan

Peasants' movement in no mood to disappear

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On 10th January 2010, Anjumn Mazareen Punjab (AMP) (Punjab Tenants Organization) organized a public meeting in Renala Kurd, 100 km from Lahore, to commemorate the 8th death anniversary of Muhammad Basher Ahmad Shaheed, the first martyr among 11 of the movement. He was killed by Rangers in 2002.

The meeting was arranged in an open venue, decorated with red flags. Over 3000 tenants, men, women and children were present braving chilly, windy and foggy weather. They had come there on tractor trolleys, motor cycles, cycles and donkey carts. Women were less in numbers this time than men, which was unusual as women have always been in great numbers on such meetings and prominent feature of all AMP activities.

From Lahore we 3 comrades, myself, Nazli and Maqsood attended this meeting and spoke on the occasion to register our continuous solidarity and support with the movement. The most important thing one can feel was the degree of determination on the faces of the tenants. They were as determined today to get their land rights as 10 years ago. The worst degree of state repression by Musharraf regime could not down their morale.

The historic tenants' movement started in year 2000 is now ten-year old. The decade of their long struggle is studded with matchless sacrifices, rigorous resistance and unwavering determination. It may be recalled that over one million tenants are struggling against Rangers and military (owners of farms) over the control of 68,000 acres of highly cultivable land which tenants have been tilling for the last 100 years.

The meeting was a clear manifestation that tenants are in no mood to disappear in the face of the state oppression. If we look at the social and political impacts of this movement these are significant in nature. The movement has helped generate new dynamics of gender power and political discourse. During the last 10 years, the movement has positively changed the gender relations in favor of women in a feudal dominated society. Women are now more empowered, out of boundary walls of the homes to play their due and important political role. Besides this a new layer of young tenants leadership has also emerged on the political scene and making local ruling elite to feel their strong presence. They are now major political actors in their local constituencies.

A cursory glance at the 10 year classical struggle also compels one to recall how peaceful tenants and their brave women fought for their land rights. This is truly a unique example at least in South Asia. These tenants faced the Musharraf regime and its repressive tactics, refused to retreat and forced Rangers to halt their oppression.

In my speech I urged the Punjab government to distribute all the state agriculture cultivable lands among the landless local peasants and women peasants be given priority in any formula recently going to be devised to hand over these lands among peasants in Punjab.

I also highlighted the role of women in the ongoing movement as they become fully aware of their importance being major stake holders. From town to town and village to village they have taken up the struggle of land right with equal burden of socio-economic responsibilities.

I emphasized the importance of women's participation in movements to start, sustain and win. I told them that the movement is a beautiful story of resistance in front of the brutal state forces. It is an unstoppable narrative of sacrifices, arrests, tortures, restrictions. And still you are determined to carry on the struggle till the fulfillment of genuine demands.