

FISHWORKERS CALL FOR MARCH TO PARLIAMENT ON NOVEMBER 11, 2009

AGAINST ASEAN-INDIA FTA

Several Major Fisheries Trade Unions organized a convention on 24th September 2009 at Ernakulam, under the banner of the **Kerala Fisheries Coordination Committee**, to oppose the recently signed **ASEAN- India Free Trade Agreement**, with a unanimous demand for “*No fish imports*”. The Agreement between India and 10 South East Asian nations signed on August 13th this year aims to allow the import of several fish products at lower tariffs into India. This would grossly impact the employment and incomes of over ten lakh traditional fish and allied workers in Kerala. Fishworkers in Kerala are already dealing with the pressure of rising investment and maintenance costs, and are unable to deal with even a one-rupee fluctuation in price.

The convention was inaugurated by Justice (Retd.) V.R. Krishna Iyer, who strongly condemned the FTA- stating that such an agreement is a betrayal of the Fishworkers right to their livelihood. He further asserted that the deep felt impacts of such an agreement would result in an erosion of the Fishworkers livelihoods and basis of existence, leading to suicides in many cases. He insisted that the only way the voice of the Fishworkers could be heard at the national level, was through a joint struggle, which would lead to an eventual victory over such anti-people measures.

Most ASEAN nations share climatic features with the Kerala coast and produce similar varieties of fish. With their fish production far exceeding domestic requirements, Kerala would undoubtedly become the dumping ground for these countries soon. Compromises on monitoring and quality control measures implicit in the agreement also bring about potential health hazards.

The anger among the Fishworkers, in the face of such a monstrous Agreement, was elaborated by T. Peter (President, KSMTF): “The Fishing Community in Kerala will take all measures to stop this agreement, and will physically prevent any vessel carrying fish from the ASEAN nations from entering Cochin Harbour”.

There was a collective call for action against the agreement, with V.V. Shashidharan (General Convenor, Kerala Fisheries Coordination Committee) stating that on October 20th, there will be protest marches and dharnas in front of Central Government Offices, at all the Districts of Kerala. And, the culmination of these protests would be a March to the Parliament on November 11, voicing the concerns of the Fishworkers communities at the national platform.

The main participants present at the gathering were as follows:

Mathew Master (**INTUC**)

M.M. Lawrence (**CITU**)

V. Dinakaran, former MLA (**Akhil Kerala Deevara Sabha**)

Joseph Xavier Kalapuraikal (**Kerala State Fishing Boat Operators Association**)

O.B. Ravindran (**BMS**)

Umar Ottumal (**STU**)

T. Peter (**KSMTF**)

P. Lawrence (**UTUC**)

A.T. Sreedharan (**HMS**)

Chavara Sarasan (**Malsya Thozhilali Congress (S)**)

Charles George (**TUCI**)