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Bangladesh

A Call to Support the Landless People Char Conference

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ESSF has received this call to support the Char Conference from Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS). The occupation of fallow land and Char (small islands) goes back to 1992. The five objectives of the conference are: Declaration of a 'National Land Action Day', compilation and preservation of the history of Khasland movement, chalking out the planning and strategy of taking possession of new Khasland, a brochure on the wounded and dead in the Khasland movement including Abbas Satter Khan who was the pioneer of Khasland movement, a policy paper on protection of landless people and livelihood in the context of global climate change.

Date of the conference: 14 April 2018.

BKF and BKS are asking for support (including financial, with the help of ESSF) to insure the success of the conference.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha first successfully occupied the Khasland (fallow land for which there is no particular owner—the government is the real owner but in accordance with land manual landless people are entitled to enjoy) in 1 January 1992 in Dashmina sub-district under Patuakhali district near the coastal belt of Bay of Bengal. Since then it has been continuing occupation of Khasland throughout the country. To date we have occupied around 76600 acres of Khasland at different points of the country. This land includes 22 Chars (small islands emerged from the river bed and surrounded by water) in the southern part, 12.5 kilometers long British regime railway abandoned land in the northern part, 9 shrimp cultivation centers in the south-western part, small areas in Rangpur district by Pahari Adivasi and some areas in Dinajpur by Santal indigenous people, and small areas in size in other different parts of the country.

This year 30 January-10 February 2018 we made a visit to different occupied areas from the north to south. The landless people living in occupied lands proposed a Char conference for reunion of landless people aiming to remember the story and history of the land struggle. According to them in 1992 when the landless people took over the land they came with their children. Now they are grown up, got married and they have their children as well but they do not know how their parents or grand parents fought a tough fight against the illegal land bandits and how they survived in the remote island isolated from the main land. Not only they have a new generation but they have achieved their food sovereignty. They are dignified owner of a piece of land amounting 1.5 acres for which they got permanent settlement since 2000. They are growing different sorts of crops, different types of seasonal vegetables, fruits, etc. Furthermore, they are raising cattle, buffaloes, goats, poultry, etc. They have their sanitary latrine and solar panel for electricity. Now they have their respectful lives. However, in the past before the occupation they were neglected in society. Nobody would care a fig for them. They would live in other people's extra abandoned house. Their whole family had to work for the master. Instead, they were provided with food or no cash money. Actually they were called 'Okrait'. That was difficult and some sorts of bondage life.

The residents in the Char are still with the natural farming. The soil of the land is very fertile. They do not need any chemical fertilizer or pesticide to produce any crops. Their agricultural produces are every healthy and nutritious. By nature their farming method is agro-ecology that is environment and ecology friendly.

In the struggle of Char occupation the role of women was praiseworthy. In some cases they were in fore front of the movement with leading role. Even after the Char occupation they built huts with straw, bamboo or whatever they found. They fought the enemies with strong determination of do or die. Although they started with straw houses now

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they have their wooden or brick-built houses. They gradually improved their condition.

With all of the good information about present living standard they are lives and livelihoods are also at risk due to the impact of global climate change. They are also the first victim as island people if any extreme weather events take place in the southern areas. The conference also will try to find how to solve this climate crisis based on their own experience and know-how. They experienced lots of storms, cyclones like SIDR, Aila, etc. So, they know how to adapt to and mitigate with impact of climate change. They also need to know that they are not the responsible for the global climate change. They are the northern rich industrial countries which account for climate change. And they have their historical and ecological dues to pay the landless victim as reparation.

If there would have been a gathering of landless people who were engaged in heroic landless movement, the new generation would have the scope to learn the experience.

Considering their arguments and a long discussion with them the final objectives of the conference have been decided in the following:

1. Declaration of a 'National Land Action Day'
2. Compilation and preservation of the history of Khasland movement
3. Chalking out the planning and strategy of taking possession in the new Khasland
4. Brochure on the wounded and dead in the Khasland movement including Abdus Satter Khan who was the pioneer of Khasland movement
5. A policy paper on protection of landless people and livelihood at the context of global climate change.

They have also decided to rise funding on their own for the conference. Each landless family will provide 2 Kg of rice as contribution to the conference. As southern part is full of canal and rivers most of the participant will come by engine boat. Thus, they will use one Kg of rice for their transport cost. The rest of the rice will go to be cooked for their meal during conference. Total participants are expected to be 5000. Out of them 3000 will surely give the rice to the organizing committee. An organizing Committee has been formed already in February 2018. This committee is taking all preparation for the conference. So, rice contribution of 3000 landless people will cover the meal for 5000 participants. As the Char conference is going to be held in one island in the south token participation at leadership level will be ensured from other different districts where occupation took place in different forms. These participants will come from far areas. Since they are not economically solvent enough they are not in position to bear the long travel cost fully. They need subsidy for their travel cost. They have to come by Rickshaw, van, bus, train, ship, launch, trawlers, etc.

Invited guests in the conference:

Chief Guest: AKM Jahangir Hossain, Former State Textile Minister of Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh and current Member of the Parliament

Special Guest: Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, Former Commerce Adviser of the Care Taker Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh in 2007-2009

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Special Guest: Khusi Kabir, Renowned social activist and coordinator of Nejera Kori

Special speakers: Veteran peasant women leader and current female Vice-Chairman of Dhasmina sub-district and President of Bangladesh Kishani Sabha

Speakers: Leaders of different organizations and local public representatives

Chair: Badrul Alam, President, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Date of the conference: 14 April 2018

Reporting time: Report will be made and sent within three months of the commencement.

Host:

Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity, Bangladesh Landless People Association.

Budget

1. Construction of a big Pandal and stage for the participants:

Tk. 90,000/-

2. Generator cost:

Tk. 10,000/-

3. Cross the river by trawler from the mainland:

Tk. 20,000/-

4. Transport cost for the participants availing from different districts: Tk. 2500X110 = Tk. 275,000/-

5. Digital banners(3 pieces):

Tk.2000X3 = Tk. 6,000/-

6. Posters (5000 pieces):

Tk.1000X 20= Tk. 20,000/-

7. Miscellaneous:

Tk. 50,000/-

Total: Tk. 471000/-

In Euro: 4710

In word: Four Thousand Seven Hundred Ten Euro Only

Apart from the landless people contribution with rice we need the above budget to make the conference a big success. Therefore, we appeal to ESSF to give support us as much as possible so that we can do everything with the conference smoothly.

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

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Bank Account:

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93100 Montreuil

France

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