

Dear Mr Ahluwalia,

While you were abroad deliberating on global matters, the Planning Commission filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court claiming that the "poverty line of Rs 25 and Rs 32 (rural and urban areas respectively) ensures the adequacy of private expenditure on food, health and education". The affidavit could not have come at a worse time when food inflation was pushing poor households to the wall even as 60 million tonnes of grain are piling in FCI godowns implying that the government itself is hoarding grain to increase food prices.

The affidavit filed by the Planning Commission in the Supreme Court skirted the two major issues that were raised by the highest court in the country: why there should be a poverty line that determines the BPL "caps" and, a request by the Bench to the Planning Commission to re-consider the poverty line. That the affidavit chose to skirt these two major issues, and chose instead to repeat the stand taken by the Planning Commission in its last affidavit in May 2011 is, we believe, an affront to the poor of this country and also the Supreme Court.

Subsequently, you have gone on defensively to say that the poverty line has no relationship to food subsidy. Yet, all central government allocations for programmes such as PDS, pensions etc are made based on these poverty ratios. Further, after drawing a ridiculously low poverty line you suggest caps on the BPL category as well as a 41 per cent cap on food subsidy which is a contradiction in terms. Perhaps you may explain to the lay public that is spending astronomical amounts on food and health care, what this poverty line is then relevant for, if not subsidies for basic needs.

Your public defense of the affidavit being "factually correct" needs to be examined against some other facts such as India being home to the largest number of hungry people, people without the advantage of education, and the highest maternal and infant mortality deaths in the world. It is also "factually correct" that India is ranked 67th out of 88 countries ranked by IFPRI in the Global Hunger Index and that nearly half of India's children remain under-nourished, twice as many as in sub-Saharan Africa. It also needs to be checked against the fact that the Planning Commission itself has admitted that households at this poverty line are getting 20 per cent less food than they require as per the government's own norms. After years of terming the IMF and the World Bank as the sources of all knowledge for how this country's economy is to be run, you have, we believe misinterpreted the FAO to suggest that the poor need less food than what the Indian government norms state.

Mr Ahluwalia, perhaps you need to reflect more on the fact that during your stewardship of the Planning Commission, India has fallen further behind neighboring and poorer (in terms of per capita income) Bangladesh, in terms of most of the human development indicators.

If Rs 25 for rural areas and 32 for urban areas per capita expenditure was "adequate" then it is not clear to us that why Planning Commission members are paid up to one hundred and fifteen times the amount (not counting the perks of free housing and health care and numerous other benefits that is enjoyed by you and members of the Planning Commission).

We believe that this affidavit is a document, no less historically significant than the "India Shining" campaign that brought the downfall of a previous regime, because it reflected arrogance and contempt for the poor comparable to the views held by the Planning Commission.

Even as we write to you, over the next twenty four hours, close to 3,000 Indian children will die of malnutrition related illness. The current 'revolution' in agriculture has led to nation-wide agrarian

distress, and will see 47 farmers committing suicide in India in the next 24 hours. Further, despite your repeated prediction over the last two years on inflation (particularly food inflation) going down, the expertise of the Planning Commission even on that front has been proved wrong. Despite the indisputable intellectual resources at its command the Planning Commission seems to require a reality check; perhaps spending more time in the villages and slums of this country would have achieved that.

The right to food campaign challenges you and all the members of the Planning Commission to live on Rs 25 / Rs 32, a day till such time that you are able to explain to the public in simple words the basis of the statement that this amount is normatively "adequate". If it cannot be explained then the affidavit should be withdrawn or else you should resign.

The Steering group of the Right to Food Campaign:

Anjali Bhardwaj, Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey (National Campaign for People's Right to Information), Annie Raja (National Federation for Indian Women), Anuradha Talwar, Gautam Modi and Madhuri Krishnaswamy (New Trade Union Initiative), Arun Gupta and Radha Holla (Breast Feeding Promotion Network of India), Arundhati Dhuru and Ulka Mahajan (National Alliance of People's Movements), Asha Mishra and Vinod Raina (Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti), Ashok Bharti (National Conference of Dalit Organizations), Colin Gonsalves (Human Rights Law Network), G V Ramanjaneyulu (Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture), Kavita Srivastava and Binayak Sen (People's Union for Civil Liberties), Lali Dhakar, Sarawasti Singh, Shilpa Dey and Radha Raghwal (National Forum for Single Women's Rights), Mira Shiva and Vandana Prasad (Jan Swasthya Abhiyan), Paul Divakar and Asha Kowtal (National Campaign for

Dalit Human Rights), Prahlad Ray and Anand Malakar (Rashtriya Viklang Manch), Subhash Bhatnagar (National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Sector workers), Jean Drèze and VB Rawat (Former Support group to the Campaign), Harsh Mander.

Representatives of Right to Food (State campaigns):

Veena Shatrugna, M Kodandram and Rama Melkote (Andhra Pradesh), Saito Basumaatary and Sunil Kaul (Assam), Rupesh (Bihar), Gangabhai and Sameer Garg (Chhattisgarh), Sejal Dand and Sumitra Thakkar (Gujarat), Abhay Kumar and Clifton (Karnataka), Balram, Gurjeet Singh and James Herenj (Jharkhand), Sachin Jain (Madhya Pradesh), Mukta Srivastava and Suresh Sawant (Maharashtra), Tarun Bharatiya (Meghalaya), Chingmak Chang (Nagaland) Bidyut Mohanty and Raj Kishore Mishra, Vidhya Das (Orissa), Ashok Khandelwal, Bhanwar Singh and Vijay Lakshmi (Rajasthan), V Suresh (Tamil Nadu), Arundhati Dhuru and Bindu Singh (Uttar Pradesh)