

Right to Food Campaign

South Africa

The right to food is a fundamental right for every person. This is recognised in international law as part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11). The South African Constitution states that: "Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food"(s27(1)(b)), "Every child has the right to basic nutrition" (s28(1)(c)), and "Everyone detained, including every sentenced prisoner has a right to adequate nutrition" (s35(2)(e). These sections are collectively called 'right to food'.

The International Covenant became international law in 1976. The 1999 General Comment 12 by the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights went further in defining the content and obligations associated with this right and suggests, amongst other things, national framework legislation to give it legal effect.

In March 2003 FIAN International convened a workshop with participants from a range of South African organisations to discuss the right to food.

FIAN is the Foodfirst Information and Action Network, an international organisation that campaigns for recognition and implementation of the right to food.

The organisations present at that workshop agreed that there is a need for a campaign to assert the right to food in South Africa. Amongst other factors, the workshop noted that over 70% of rural people live in poverty, 1 in 4 children are stunted by the age of 6, and those most in need often do not benefit from the grants and programmes that are supposed to deal with this crisis.

The workshop defined three main campaign objectives:

1. Not one more death due to a lack of access to adequate food
2. Not one more child's potential limited by a lack of basic nutrition
3. Every person to have the opportunity to produce, earn, or receive sufficient support to feed and sustain themselves

The campaign aims to build on existing work that contributes to the achievement of these objectives. This will be done through mobilising support, the dissemination of information, co-ordination of activities, and organising of joint events focussed on the right to food. Current and envisaged activities include:

1. Mobilisation and advocacy around laws and policies like the Food Security Bill, the implementation of regulations regarding Social Relief of Distress in terms of the Social Assistance Act, effective implementation of Land Reforms, changes to Fishing Regulations, and the call for a Basic Income Grant
2. Legal challenges to assert the right to food and foster compliance with its obligations based on international instruments

Organisations participating included: Artisanal Fishers Association, Black Sash, COSATU, CLC, FAWU, LRC, NALEDI, Nkuzi, NLC, RDSN, SAAPAWU, SACC, TCOE, Thandanani, TRAC NW, and TRALSO.

Indicators of Poverty in South Africa	
No. of food poor people	1999 - 19.2 million
No. of people <R401 per adult equivalent per month	2001 - 21.1 Million
% of children 1-9 years stunted	1999 - 21.6%

- and the Bill of Rights.
3. Engagement in processes and events such as the investigations into food price increases and the Food Security and Jobs Summit.

A conference is planned to take place before the end of 2003 to bring together a wide range of South African organisations that subscribe to the concept of a right to food and the above objectives. This will be an opportunity to further develop the campaign and its structures.

We are calling on all organisations and individuals wishing to join this campaign and participate in the forth-coming conference to note their interest or request further information by contacting Eric Watkinson at eric@naledi.org.za or 011-403 2122.