



*Victims of caste discrimination in the flood rehabilitation sharing their testimonies during the public hearing organised by HRFDL-K on Nov. 7, 2009 in Bangalore.*

## **Public meeting – injustice to Dalits in the relief and rehabilitation efforts of the Government in the flood affected regions of North Karnataka**

Venue: Legislators Hall, Bangalore

Date: Nov. 7, 2009

Human Rights for Forum for Dalit Liberation – Karnataka organised a public interaction with the survivors of the recent floods in North Karnataka. Bijapur, Koppal, Gulbarga, Raichur and Bellary districts were represented. The meeting primarily focussed on the injustice and discrimination meted out to the Dalits in access to aid and rehabilitation post the floods.

The meeting was presided over by State Convenor HRFDL-K, Basavaraj Kowtal. The Chief dignitaries were Justice A J Sadashiva – SC/ST Commission Chairman, Dr. Dwaraknath Chairperson Minority Commission, Shri Doriasamy Freedom Fighter, Ms. B T Lalita Naik, Ex Minister and Women leader, Shri Bhupati, lawyers Forum for Social Justice and Shri Shiv Sunder, writer and activist.

During the course of the meeting, the Dalit survivors shared their first hand account of the discrimination that they faced in the rehabilitation provided by Government.

Durgamma from *Harannahalli*, Hospet Taluka, Bellary District whose house was destroyed in the flood, shared they was given Rs. 5000 as compensation, whereas the upper caste community received Rs.30,000 each. Apparently, all houses ruined were mud houses. Along with her, people from same district also shared the discrimination in the compensation for crop loss

Ramesh from Bijapur shared about the mass scale devastation from Indi and Sindhagi taluks. 500 houses from a declared slum in Bijapur town was razed to the ground by bull dozers and the people already suffering from the floods were put into further misery. He

shared personal accounts of incidents where the dalits were sent back from the Ganji Kendra's and asked to come back with their own plates. The Ganji Kendra's are now not even providing one basic meal to the families. The most disturbing account was of the way in which Dalits were not allowed to take refuge in the temples and schools when the flood waters were rising to dangerous levels. Situation as of now is that the Dalits are left without houses, food and basic services. Ramesh further stated, the compensation coming in was also namesake. There is no proper record of criteria for assessment and compensation. People were provided with small chits of paper which they need to present in the bank to receive the money. In addition, the banks refused to encash the cheques and were asked to pay Rs.150 to open the bank account.

Children have been the most affected. The Government promised to provide books and education support to the children within a week, but until now, nothing has reached them. Children have already lost out on one month of schooling. With the approaching winter, the families are in need of warm clothes.

Narsappa from Hulgunchi village, Sindhanur Taluk, Raichur District shared about the way in which the implementation is totally shabby and insensitive. The District administration insists on using old records dating as old as 1992 for rehabilitation. For example, the current survey reveals that there are 85 dalit families residing in the village, but the district administration is going by the old record which shows only 46 dalit families. He also shared another disturbing issue about the impact of rehabilitation being given to the religious heads, like the matha's. He shared that the Ram Krishna swamiji has decided to adopt Hulgunchi and now wants to change the village name to Ram Krishna Nagar. He also insists that the people deposit their compensation money into his bank account, to which he would add more money and reconstruct the houses.

The panel members towards the end of the meeting, which the time is now for action and not only talks. They emphasized that it is not really a gap of information, but lack of proactive efforts from the Government.

The key resolutions adopted from this meeting include:

1. Urging the State Government, District administration and Disaster management authority to monitor effectively the relief and rehabilitation to affected Dalit families.
2. The different Dalit *vedikes* and human rights organisations, media and individuals will tour the affected districts and hold discussions with district administration of identified cases of discrimination.
3. The cases will be documented and shared to the public.
4. To file cases under SC/ST Act against officials and others' discriminative and casteist attitude and practices towards dalit communities.
5. Rehabilitation programme should be implemented by the state machineries and should not be sub-contracted to private agencies particularly religious groups.
6. Order of re survey in villages where dalits have been left out from the lists eligible to receive aid and compensation.
7. Text books, school bags and uniforms should be immediately provided to children affected by floods.
8. All schools and anganwadi's should be well equipped and functional. Regular health check ups should be conducted.

Please read the article below:

## Caste discrimination in rehabilitation work alleged

Special Correspondent

*'Help from private agencies should be channelled through Government'*

Bangalore: On what basis did some families in the flood-hit districts of north Karnataka get a compensation of Rs. 1,500 for a destroyed house, while others got up to Rs. 30,000 even when the nature of construction and extent of built area was equal?

### Discrepancies

Caste discrimination was at the root of many such discrepancies in rehabilitation work in Bijpur, Bellary, Gulbarga and other districts, alleged persons from these areas in their testimonies at a public hearing organised by Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation (HRFDL) here on Saturday.

They listed discriminations of various kinds: in compensation given for destroyed houses and crops, restricted access to gruel centres, barring entry into rehabilitation centres when they are in religious places such as temples, and so on. "They give money to those who have got it once, leaving out poor people like me," said Durgamma from Hospet taluk in Bellary district.

Kamala Bai from Karjol in Bijapur district said the Dalits and the poor got a raw deal even though the former Minister Govind Karjol hailed from her village.

P. Ramesh from Bijapur alleged that the district administration had used the floods as an excuse to demolish two slums.

"Rather than help rebuild our houses, whatever remained our houses was destroyed without any notice," he said.

Basavaraj Kowthal, convenor of HRFDL, objected to the rehabilitation work being done through maths and other religious organisations as it led to caste discrimination. He demanded that help for rehabilitation from private agencies be channelled through the Government. Justice A.J. Sadashiva, who heads the panel set up to probe discrimination against the Scheduled Castes, said that problems in rehabilitation should be corrected rather than stopped.

### Barriers

He said that caste barriers should be done away with while rebuilding villages and people from various castes should not be segregated in allotment of houses and sites.