

28th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
Delivered by Ms Susan Price – Franciscans International

Thank you Mr. President,

Franciscans International would like to welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur. We endorse your recommendation on the need to have mechanisms in place to provide adequate, effective and timely remedies in response to violations. We join the Special Rapporteur in commending India for the adoption of the National Food Security Act of 2013. We noted improvements in food distribution in several states. However, we have found that the distribution of ration cards does not consistently reach the most marginalized populations. Various Adivasi groups, hill tribes, Dalits, the rural poor and urban migrants have been unable to fully benefit from this act.

We have also found cases indicating the ineligibility of interstate migrants as beneficiaries due to their lack of requisite documents, such as birth registration and identity cards. In addition, corruption within local administrations involved in the Public Distribution System is of particular concern. We believe that the implementation of this Act should be accompanied by an effective monitoring mechanism that addresses these issues and provides alternative solutions to violations, at all levels.

Recently, we have been alerted that the Government of India has started the process of replacing the Public Distribution System (PDS) with cash transfers. As was recommended by the High Level Committee on the Food Corporation of India, money will be transferred to those who are eligible, in place of food grains. We strongly believe that the PDS system is essential to combatting hunger and malnutrition in India. Cash transfers do not guarantee access to food, are susceptible to inflation and do not automatically curtail leakages. The shift to cash transfers will have the greatest effect on vulnerable groups, including internally displaced peoples, single women, people living in conflict zones, migrants and the elderly. Many tribal villages in the mountain areas of the North Eastern States have infrequent access to banks and remain almost entirely cut off during monsoon season. There is also fear that women will lose control over food options, as men will predominately control the cash. The Indian agricultural sector, which normally provides the requisite grains for the PDS, will also be affected. As the government will no longer need to procure grains, the prices will be at the mercy of the market.

We express deep regret that there was not more public consultation on this issue. We find that the policy runs in contradiction to the provision of the National Food Security Act. Several state governments such as Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh have expressed disagreement with implementing cash transfers. We believe that assuring food security through government cooperation is key to the universal enjoyment of the right to food, as well as in addressing the root causes of extreme poverty.

Therefore we recommend the Government of India to:

- 1. Immediately implement the National Food Security Act in all states;**
- 2. Put in place an effective monitoring mechanism that includes procedures to address violations and corruption, which is in line with the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur.**

Thank you.