21 April 2020

Shri Hemant Soren

Chief Minister, Jharkhand

Dear Mr. Soren,

We are writing to alert you to the imminent danger of hunger and starvation in Jharkhand in the absence of any effective provision for the delivery of food rations to households without ration card.

The Jharkhand government claims to be “universalizing” the public distribution system, but nothing of the sort is happening.

A weak provision does exist for delivering 10 kg of foodgrain per month (for two months) to NFSA-eligible households that do not have a ration card. However, the application process is complicated and most people are not aware of it. Numerous field reports suggest that this provision covers just a small fraction of households without ration card.

About 8 lakh households in Jharkhand have applied for a ration card and most of them are likely to be poor households. In this crisis situation, there is no time to verify each applicant’s eligibility under NFSA (and the fact that it has not been done earlier is the government’s responsibility). Therefore, we urge you to provide emergency ration cards to all these 8 lakh households without delay, for an initial period of at least one year.

Even if rice has to be bought from the FCI at Rs 22/kg for this purpose, it would cost just Rs 44 crore per month to provide 25 kg of free foodgrain per household (on average) to these 8 lakh households.

We would also suggest extending the same provision to other households that do not have a ration card, based on self-declaration of eligibility under Jharkhand’s NFSA eligibility criteria.

Finally, we advise you once again to prevail on the central government to provide a special foodgrain allocation to Jharkhand, free of cost, so that the PDS can be universalised in rural areas and urban slums, as per NFSA entitlements, for a period of at least one year.

Yours sincerely,

Asharfi Nand Prasad, Balram, Jean Drèze, Siraj Dutta, Sunil Minz, Varsha Poddar

(right to food campaign, Jharkhand)