

Date: September 30, 2008

**Dr. Manmohan Singh**  
**Hon'ble Prime Minister of India**  
**South Block, Raisina Hill,**  
**New Delhi,**  
**India-110 011.**  
**Fax: 91-11-23019545 / 91-11-23016857**

**Sub: Concerns on the proposals of ICDS.**

**Dear Dr Man Mohan Singh Ji,**

We are approaching you today with a hope that you are able to change the direction of national child health and nutrition programmes in India including universalizing Anganwadi Centres of ICDS towards saving more than 100 million underweight children and preventing 2 million child deaths under the age five.

We are appalled to read the news in the Times of India dated 23rd and 24th September 2008 – “*Unfazed, Renuka re-packages Ready-to-eat Scheme*”, and “*Cabinet to take up ready-to-eat plan debate*”, where it is mentioned that 8 crore children of India will be given ready-to-eat food instead of meals prepared by village communities, SHGs and Mahila Mandals - hot cooked meals - through the ICDS scheme. The repackaged plan, which is now being extended to all age groups, is what has been, in fact opposed by the PMO, Finance ministry, the Planning Commission, the 11<sup>th</sup> plan document and above all the Supreme Court of India. We understand that this issue will now be settled in the Cabinet, **it seems to us an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court orders.**

The Supreme Court's Order of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2004 states:

The contractors shall not be used for supply of nutrition in Anganwadis and preferably ICDS funds shall be spent by making use of village communities, self-help groups and Mahila Mandals for buying of grains and preparation of meals.

Further, the Supreme Court reiterated this stand on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006. The EFC proposal put up by the Ministry does not have a vision for dealing with malnutrition and in fact ignores very vital recommendations made by the planning commission committees, besides being in direct contradiction to the orders of the Supreme Court.

We, as members of civil society and professional bodies, are concerned that such a push towards introducing all kinds of “Ready to Use Foods”, industrially produced or pre-packaged foods, including ready to use therapeutic foods etc. (without any guidelines or safeguards) will go against the interests of India's children and women.

Technical experts both in India and in other countries, including developed countries, have never ever recommended that infants and children be provided packaged meals. Countries are in fact moving away from such foods and are moving towards healthy eating habits for their populations in their nutrition action plans which aims at improving overall health and development.

Why should India take retrograde stand?

“Ready-to-Use Foods” in whatever form, will lead to not just dependency on processed and industrially processed foods, and set an unhealthy trend in the country, it will also destroy our vast cultural and food diversity. This proposal is not likely to result in improved nutrition outcomes because of fundamental problems of sustainability and poverty. Moreover the proposal for introducing “Ready to Use Foods” in a national programme like ICDS is likely to increase corruption as has been clearly foreseen by the comments on proposals by the Finance Ministry and PMO.

If the Cabinet accepts this proposal it will legitimize the transformation of poverty and child malnutrition into a source of profits for the food industry; public funds will begin a reverse flow towards the industry rather than towards eradicating the root causes of underdevelopment and inequity that leads to such problems.

We request you, as the country's Prime Minister, to take a decision to strike down the proposal of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and do not allow introducing packaged foods or commercial foods in any guise. We also request you to move towards the considered opinion of the

PMO, the Finance Ministry, and the Planning Commission formed over the past two to three years of extensive consultations with public health experts, civil society, programme persons and many others, towards eliminating child malnutrition.

**To summarise, we request you to ensure the following as part of the solution:**

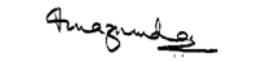
1. A policy to provide locally procured and locally prepared meals to children in the ICDS programme as per the directions of Supreme Court.
2. Comprehensive coordinated action plan with earmarked budget for protecting and promoting early and exclusive breastfeeding for 0-6 months, and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary feeding (with use of indigenous, sustainable, home made foods) for children after 6 months to 2 years as a primary step to prevent child malnutrition and related infant morbidity and mortality.
3. A clear mechanism to link ICDS and NRHM
4. Policy and safeguards for avoidance of all 'conflicts of interest' in the area of infant and young child feeding and nutrition.
5. Constitution of a high level autonomous national authority to ensure all of the above.

**We like to reiterate that there is no place for promoting any commercial or centrally procured foods for any age group. We hope that you and your Cabinet will not be a party to violate the spirit of the Supreme Court orders rather take a positive stand to benefit all children and women. On Gandhi Jayanti day this will be a befitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi ji by making our programmes to be effective and reach the poorest.**

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

  
(Harsh Mander)

  
(Dr. Vina Mazumdar)

  
(Mina Swaminathan)

  
(Jean Dreze)

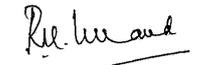
  
(AK Shiv Kumar)

  
(Rahul Dev)

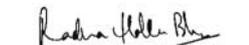
  
(Dr. Vandana Prasad)

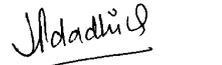
  
(Dr. Arun Gupta)

  
(Dr. Mira Shiva)

  
(Dr. R.K. Anand)

  
(Biraj Patnaik)

  
(Radha Holla Bhar)

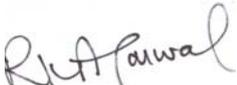
  
(Dr. J.P. Dadhich)

  
(Sachin Jain)

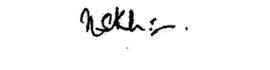
  
(Savitri Ray)

  
(Devika Singh)

  
(Dr. Dharam Prakash)

  
(Dr. RK Aggarwal)

  
(Chander Uday Singh)

  
(Prof Navdeep Singh)

  
(Mridula Bajaj)

  
(Bharti Ali)

  
(Enakshi Ganguly Thukral)

  
(Dr. K.S. Velayutham)

  
(Dr. P.K. Shah)

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## List of Signatories

1.	Mr. Harsh Mander	Social Activist
2.	Dr. Ms .Vina Mazumdar	National Research Professor of Social Sciences (GOI), works on Women's issues
3.	Dr. Ms. Mina Swaminathan	Advisor, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation
4.	Mr. Jean Dreze	Economist, Professor Allahabad University
5.	Mr. A K Shiva Kumar	Economist
6.	Mr. Rahul Dev	Senior Journalist
7.	Dr. Vandana Prasad	Community Pediatrician, and Public Health Resources Network (PHRN)
8.	Dr. Arun Gupta	Pediatrician and national coordinator of Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India
9.	Dr. Mira Shiva	Director, Initiative for Health Equity & Society Diverse Women for Diversity
10.	Dr. R.K. Anand	Senior Pediatrician, Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai
11.	Mr. Biraj Patnaik	Social Activist and member working group for children under six
12.	Ms. Radha Holla Bhar	Social Activist for Women's issues
13.	Dr. J.P. Dadhich	Pediatrician, SL Jain Hospital Delhi, and member of National Neonatology Forum
14.	Mr. Sachin Jain	Development Journalist, Vikas Samvad
15.	Ms. Devika Singh	Advocacy Consultant, Mobile Crèche
16.	Dr. Dharam Prakash	Senior Pediatrician Delhi, and Jt Secretary Indian Medical Association (IMA)
17.	Dr. R.K. Aggarwal	President, Indian Academy of Pediatrics
18.	Ms. Enakshi Ganguly Thukral	Co-Director, HAQ: Centre For Child Rights
19.	Ms. Bharti Ali	Co-Director, HAQ: Centre For Child Rights
20.	Mr. Chander Uday Singh	Advocate, Mumbai
21.	Dr. P K Shah	Senior Obstetrician Mumbai, & Dy. Secretary General, Federation of Obst & Gyne Societies (FOGSI), Mumbai
22.	Dr. K Shanmugam Velayutham	Child care activist in Tamil Nadu Forces
23.	Prof. Navdeep Singh	Nephrologist and medical teachers.
24.	Ms. Mridulla Bajaj	Executive Director, Mobile Crèche
25.	Ms Savitri Ray	National Coordinator FORCES