



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2013]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## India: A long way to go to ensure food security

1 Set to overtake China as the world's most populous nation by 2030, India has a population of over 1.2 billion and is facing an enormous food shortage crisis. Government corruption has rendered it impossible to institute any lasting means through which to feed the Indian people. India has the largest population of hungry citizens, and is home to more than half of hungry children worldwide. Overall, these impoverished Indians represent an incredible 25% of the world's hungry. According to government figures, In India, about 43% of the children are malnourished, and 61,000,000 children are chronically malnourished. Malnourishment of child bearing aged women is also an issue, with over 60% of Indian women suffering from anaemia.

2. While the Indian government has made surface level attempts to alleviate hunger and poverty concerns, the reality is that the situation in India remains dire and seriously hinders the economic and social progress of the self-touted World's Largest Democracy. The recently introduced National Food Security Bill aims to initiate food subsidies that would help distribute grain to 75% of India's population. While the bill itself appears good on paper, little can be done to implement the bill effectively while government corruption remains as rampant as it is.

3. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) publishes country ratings out of 100 based on the severity of hunger, with a lower score indicating less hunger. As Gross National Income (GNI) per capita increases, the GHI score is predicted to decrease commensurate with economic growth. This is the case with most countries. Alarming, India is an outlier in this study, as the disparity between economic development and hunger grew wider, away from the average. This indicates that in relation to increases in India's income, poverty eradication has not kept up at an appropriate level, based on figures from 117 countries used in the study. While there are many possible reasons for this, assuredly one comes from the government not taking action to improve the economic situation of its' poorest citizens.

4. Case 1: In Sheopur district in the state of Madhya Pradesh in Central India, the death toll of children under the age of 10 has increased, with little government response to stem the problem. This issue was brought to the attention of the Asian Human Rights Commission when, in October of 2012, the names of twenty eight more children were added to the death toll due to malnutrition. While the deaths are shocking themselves, what is more alarming is the local administrations refusal to acknowledge the severity of the situation. These deaths have been blamed on gastrointestinal diseases such as diarrhea, which, in and of itself, is unlikely to be a cause of death unless coupled with compromised immune systems due to years of malnourishment.

5. The malnourishment situation was confirmed by personal visit by Vandana Prasad, a member of the National Commissioner for Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCCR). She noted that the schools and authorities were unequipped to monitor the health situations of children. This indicates criminal negligence on the part of the administration to effectively monitor the health of students, despite receiving government funds dedicated for that specific purpose. This indicates misuse of funding intended for the underprivileged.

6. Case 2: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called this case the country's "biggest national shame", as private companies were found to be stealing food designated for government welfare programs working to alleviate malnutrition. The Asian Human Rights Commission released an alert in November of 2012, claiming that these private companies have stolen over 1000 Crore INR, a sum equivalent to USD 185,000,000 in the state of Maharashtra alone. These findings come from a report written by Biraj Patnaik, Principal Adviser, Commissioners to the Supreme Court, which was "submitted to the court with

reference to SLP (Civil) No. 10654 of 2012 in the matter of Vyankateshwar Mahila Auyodhigik Sahakari Sanstha v. Purnima Upadhyay and Others listed along with Civil Writ Petition 196 of 2001 (PUCL v. UOI)” The report estimates total stolen amount to be close to 8000 Crore INR and finds that all this is done in direct contravention of various orders of the Supreme Court in the Civil Writ Petition 196/ 2001 (PUCL vs. UOI).”

7. The food was stolen from the Integrated Child Development Scheme, a program instituted by UNICEF and the Indian government with assistance from the World Bank in 1975, which aims to improve health, nutrition, and development of Indian children less than six years of age. The beneficiaries of the program include children under six, mothers, and women between the child bearing ages of 15 and 44. The program has seen success in decreasing percentages of low weight newborns and infant mortality, while increasing immunization coverage, health services, and child nutrition.

8. According to Bloomberg, corrupt politicians and their criminal affiliates have siphoned away USD 14.5 billion worth of food intended for India’s poor, or roughly 60% of the total food allotted for this purpose. Of the food that does reach its beneficiaries, much of it is unfit for humans to consume, even by the minimal standards set by the Indian government. The lack of regulation in the ICDS supply chain and refusal of authorities to respond reiterates the high level of corruption in Indian government. The absolute failure of the Indian executive indicates government inefficiencies, disregard for human rights, and a continued relationship between corrupt private businesses and political players.

9. Addressing the extreme situation of poverty and hunger in India is best done by targeting corruption and impunity in the Indian government. Because the right to food is inherently linked to the right to life, the Indian Supreme Court has itself agreed that it is the responsibility of government to provide nutrition and public health. The Asian Human Rights Commission, its sister organisation of Asian Legal Resource Centre, appeals to the United Nations to act on behalf of Indian’s impoverished communities and help stem the corruption that has caused India to be unable to adequately care for its citizens.

10. Recommended steps for helping ensure Indian citizens’ right to food:

- Act immediately in order to prevent even more deaths from malnutrition;
- Ensure effective monitoring of all stages of the ICDS supply chain to prevent pilfering at any level;
- Ensure that all government funded welfare schemes are required to keep track of their books and goods according to international financial standards;
- Work to assure that good and services are reaching their intended beneficiaries;
- End government corruption and impunity by appointing an independent committee to investigate those who commit crimes;
- Recognize individual offenders and hold them accountable through the judiciary;
- Develop a means through which the administration can efficiently deal with any infractions in the future.