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To

All the Zonal/Divisional/State/Regional Units

TIME TO STAND BY THE POOR AND MARGINALISED

The AIIEA had informed its units and members about the outbreak of the lethal Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in its circular dated 20th March 2020. Globally, the number of confirmed cases continues to increase at an alarming rate. It has claimed over 33,976 lives and infected around 7,22,196 people across 201 countries. The pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to humanity.

The number of cases in India also is increasing steadily with each passing day. There have been 27 deaths with 1,024 positive cases in India. With our public healthcare facilities in an abysmal state, thanks to years of governmental apathy and neglect, a serious health crisis is certain to unfold in the days to come. Since the testing facilities are woefully inadequate in India compared to the demands of the times, the government understandably had little choice than to enforce a nationwide lockdown for 21 days. The AIIEA fully supports the preventive measures announced by the Central government and various State governments to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate the disaster. The AIIEA also expects that the lockdown period would be judiciously used by the government not only to break the infection chain but to isolate the infected from the general population and give them proper hospitalisation and care.

The health crisis and the consequent lockdown have now given rise to a humanitarian crisis of huge proportions. The poor and destitute have been put to great hardships owing to the lockdown. The 450 million workers in India's informal sector, which employs more than 90% of India's workforce and contributes half of the GDP faces the toughest time ever. The rural and urban poor, the street side vendors, rickshaw pullers, domestic helps, garbage collectors, daily wage earners etc. are in dire straits now. With no jobs, no source of livelihood, no income and virtually no hope left, the migrant labourers have to walk hundreds of miles to reach their homes. No other crisis in our recent memory had as poignantly brought out our stark social and economic inequalities as the present one has. What a tragedy that while one minuscule section of India is obsessed with devising ways to pass the leisure time from the safe confines of their homes, another large section of our countrymen is staring at a bleak future with their home and hearth gone.

How can we remain silent and mute spectators in this hour of crisis? Huge efforts and resources are needed to combat the situation. Food and shelter apart, isolation beds, testing kits, ventilators, masks etc. have to be arranged on an emergency footing. No effort of the central and state governments seems adequate in view of the enormity of the crisis.

As a responsible trade union, we must reach out to the poor and needy and offer them support and assistance in whatever way possible. We are happy that some of our divisional and zonal units have started distributing relief materials in their areas in a limited way. We are also aware that our units have restricted their scale of operations this time around because of the restrictions of the lockdown. Given the seriousness of the situation, we also feel that our units should respect the restrictions imposed by different state governments to contain the spread of the virus. That apart, our members should not risk their lives as well. We nevertheless have to rise to the occasion and contribute our mite to the national effort at mitigating the disaster.

As a token of our commitment to the poor and marginalised, the AIEA is remitting a sum of Rs. 5 lacs to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. Since various state governments are also taking extensive measures to contain the pandemic and its economic fallout, we call upon insurance employees all over the country to donate liberally to their respective Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Our units can make the necessary arrangements to collect the funds and send to the CM Relief Fund of their respective States. In places like Bangalore where our units have decided to undertake the relief on their own, they can go ahead with their relief work.

We request everyone to take necessary precautionary measures as announced by the government and help the nation overcome the crisis. We also request our comrades not to fall prey to malicious social media campaigns, especially WhatsApp campaigns, of vested interests directed against particular region or community. Our comrades should also refrain from unnecessarily forwarding unverified messages which vitiate the harmony of the country.

We are confident that our comrades and units will live up to the expectations of the organisation and the need of the society. Let's stand in solidarity with all our countrymen and women in this hour of unprecedented crisis.

With greetings,

Comradely Yours



General Secretary