

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

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Alliance of Indian Wastepickers is a national coalition of organizations working with waste-pickers and other informal waste workers. The alliance was created to have coordinated efforts to ensure inclusion of waste pickers in various national level programmes. Members of the alliance are from more than 10 states of India and represent more than 45000 wastepickers.

23rd March 2020

To

Shri Narendra Modi

Honourable Prime Minister of India

New Delhi

Subject: Safety of the waste-pickers and informal waste collectors during Covid 19 pandemic.

Respected Sir

We the members of the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers, welcome your address to the nation given on 19th March 2020, where you called sanitation workers defenders of the nation. For earning our livelihood, we waste-pickers and informal waste collectors have been keeping our cities and towns clean. In the times of Covid 19 pandemic, we are working diligently. Even though the prices of the commodities i.e. waste paper, plastic, cardboard, junk metal have gone down significantly, we have not left our work. We the waste-pickers and informal waste collectors along with the other sanitation workers are the first lines of defence against the spread of the disease. As defenders, we are equally vulnerable to contracting the disease ourselves. Due to the nature of the work, many of our colleague waste-pickers and informal waste collectors have low immunity. **We earn our livelihood on day to day basis, this does not leave us with the luxury of working from home.** In the times of pandemic, when we must wash our hands with soaps but we do not have access to regular and clean water. We welcome the celebration of our work, further, we will appreciate if our following demands are met:

1. Provisioning occupational safety gears- good quality masks, gloves, towels, shoes to all the waste-pickers and informal waste collectors. All urban and rural local bodies,

resident and apartment welfare associations should be directed to make them available at all times.

2. All urban and rural local bodies, as well as resident and apartment welfare associations, should be asked to make necessary arrangements for waste-pickers and informal waste collectors to wash their hands. The provision of sanitisers for workers where washing of hands is not possible must be made mandatory.
3. With the waste material markets collapsing across the country, there has been a loss of income. We request that all waste-pickers and informal waste collectors be given emergency basic income of INR 10,000 per month per household.
4. Similarly, ration (including grains, soap/hand sanitizer, oil, sugar and salt) which can sustain the waste-pickers and informal waste collectors and their families and all residents of the slums and other informal settlements, for the next three months should be given immediately, without the requirement of biometrics via the Public Distribution System. The government must take action against the price rise of essential commodities, food items and medicines.
5. The settlements of waste-pickers and informal waste collectors are densely populated and the residents highly vulnerable to the spread of Covid 19, we strongly recommend that the government should arrange regular health camps for screening and medication purposes in all the slums and other informal settlements.
6. There must be an immediate suspension of all eviction, demolitions and urgent regularization of all our settlements. Measures should be taken for providing clean water, electricity and sanitation in our settlements. Charges for using public toilets and urinals should be removed and the toilets and urinals are cleaned regularly. They should be equipped with soaps, refilled every day by the local bodies, or resident/apartment complexes.
7. In case of fatality related to Covid 19, the compensation similar to the one is given for rail accident casualties or for the onsite death of construction worker or INR 10,00,000 should be given next to the kin as demanded by many informal (unorganized) workers unions.

While the eligibility to any such provisions may be based on the occupational identity cards given by the municipal authorities and rural local bodies, trade unions, civil society organizations, resident and apartment welfare associations and the database of waste-pickers organizations and the relevant government bodies be used as a way to identify waste-pickers

and extending these schemes. The effort should be made for the emergency basic income, ration and fatality compensation be universal and no exclusion of any waste-picker or informal waste collector be allowed.

We the waste-pickers and informal waste collectors request the government to give directions to the relevant departments, state governments and urban and rural local bodies for the satisfaction of our demands.

Endorsed by the following organizations:

Center for Applied Research and People's Engagement, Aurangabad

Centre for Sustainable Development, Nagpur

Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre, Guntur

Delhi Roundtable on Solid Waste Management, Delhi

Hasiru Dala, Bengaluru

Iainehskhem Self Help Group, Shillong

Janvikas Society, Indore

Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat, Pune

Lokadhikar, Delhi

Main Bhi Dilli, Delhi

National Coalition for Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanization, Delhi

Rajasthan Kachra Majdoor Sangh, Jaipur

Recity Private Network Limited, Mumbai

Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Mumbai

Swacch Nagpur Association, Nagpur