

Janadesh indabad!

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Late September

Dear Friends! Jai Jagat!

First of all sorry for not being able to produce any newsletter in September as all Ekta Parishad members were busier than ever with the final preparations and some important meetings that took place during the last few days (notably with the Minister for Rural Development Dr.Raghuvansh Prasad).

Here is what **Jill** (Rajagopal's wife) expressed just before she left Delhi for Janadesh, in Gwalior:

"The Janadesh campaign was in high gear in the month of September. In typical Indian style everything comes together at the last moment defying imagination: Mobilization in Bihar has reached the level of 4000 villagers in spite of heavy rains. Adivasis communities in Chhattisgarh were subject to widespread burning of their crops by forest department officials yet 3500 are still preparing to come to the Gwalior March. This again reminds us of the resilience of the people and the hardship which they can endure. The Janadesh office was also a sight to be seen with people working around the clock; i.e; working to engage senior officials of the Indian Government, and preparing to welcome the 200 odd foreign guests – and not to forget the public opinion building in Delhi; It has been a memorable month; only to be exceeded by what lies ahead..."

Events abroad

Before we tell you about the first days of the Janadesh foot march, we would like to thank all our friends around the globe for all their support and for organizing so many events around peace, non-violence and Rights to natural resources.

In Europe, a wonderful foot march called "Land for Life" took place in **Switzerland** from Berne to Geneva with hundreds of supporters walking in spite of some rainy days! They walked from the 25th September to the 2nd October, where they had a round table with important people, including the Former Swiss President.



A school program took place also in Switzerland, as Margrit Hugentobler and Küde Meyer told us. A college near Zurich organized an extraordinary solidarity project: "the 1000 students of the school were assembled around a map of India and introductions were made as to Janadesh and the goals of *Ekta Parishad*. As the project was introduced, they unfurled a banner from the fourth floor of the school – and the principal put his first footprint below the Janadesh writing, giving a donation to Janadesh."



In **France**, several events were also organized, i.e. a 1-day walk (6Km) on 30th September called "Marche de Solidarité" in Brittany by *Peuples Solidaires & Confédération Paysanne* including visits of farms and ending with a concert.

A **Belgian** newspaper wrote one full page article about Janadesh (http://www.enmarche.be/International/Grande_marche_New-Delhi.htm) and a Swiss German newspaper also published one full page on Janadesh and Land for Life.

In **Canada**, on 2nd October, Ekta Canada organized a seminar about Non-Violence (see www.ektacanada.org).

In **USA**, an interfaith group organized a 1 day fast to promote non-violence and peace in Washington (see <http://interfaithfast.org/>).

Launching the Janadesh Yatra in Gwalior!!

On the **1st October** evening, 15000 landless people were already gathered at the Mela Ground and we had some introduction to Janadesh by senior Gandhian leaders and Rajagopal, President of Ekta Parishad.

On **2nd October**, more poor landless farmers arrived from different parts of India and totally, around 23,500 participants were gathered in Gwalior with thousands of white and green flags.



The ceremonies and speeches started on the stage at 9 in the morning. Everybody was impressed about the wonderful organization of all the landless participants during the speeches and during the 1st day of march (6Km), which will be followed by another 26 days, to reach Delhi after a total of 320 Km.

Almost 25,000 people poured out onto the national highway, confronting searing heat and a long tarmac of pavement stretching for the miles ahead.



On the march, the resilience of the local people was evident. The people carried themselves with a dignity and every step was deliberate as they got closer to their destination --the national capital. Tribal women with silver jewelry pierced from their drooping ear-lobes; dalit women from Bihar that were navigating the hot pavement with plastic bags on their feet as they were too poor to own sandals; baiga men with the symbolic bow and men with turbans and long mustaches found themselves leading the march to the national seat of power. This was done with a sense of pride and purpose; they represented people's power.



On day two (**3rd October**), after six hours of marching the 25,000 people that were broken into 24 units stopped at different stations to bath from water tankers, wash their clothes --laying them out on the national highway to dry, took rest and then they proceed to cook their food. Everything was done by the local people. As one traveled like a pedestrian down the half of the highway that was closed, one could witness the different groups --reminiscent of village life. People were singing and dancing. Their songs expressed their struggle. They were ready to take on the state from their humble positions because they feel the strength of having each other, not only their community but a large formation of people, and a leader like Rajagopal.

Rajagopal, a diminutive figure that stands at the head of the march is a tower of strength. He works out his twenty meetings an hour with onlookers, guests and fellow marchers with a sense of art. He accepts gifts with humility and tells people about the importance of the walk. He is an instrument of people's power that is rare in India today. He knows the road is long and he has to stand firm. From thirty years of building cadre and rural people's consciousness, he is convinced of the justice of the march.

Foreign participants to Janadesh:

We are happy to welcome 200 foreigners (from 10 to 77 years old!!) who will come at different moments of the march. They are coming from **more than 20 countries**: Nepal, Thailand, France, Belgium, Germany, UK, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Kenya, Ireland, Laos, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, East Timor, Pakistan, Japan, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, USA...

All of them are giving a wonderful support to the landless poor by sharing their time in the march! Some have already published articles or sent reportages for TV Channels. A representative of the indigenous people of Canada (Regional Chief Atleo) also came to remind us all the importance of local cultures and languages. He also came to share the history of the First Nations of Canada and to strengthen all indigenous communities across the globe by uniting. A representative of the UN (Mr Yves Berthelot) was also present for the flag off of the march. He gave a very encouraging and supporting speech and recently announced that he will speak with Mr. Kofi Annan soon about the issue of landless people.

Some pictures & articles:

- In English, see BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7023369.stm
- In French, see l'Huma: http://www.humanite.fr/2007-10-02_International_Les-sans-terre-vers-New-Dehli