

SOUTHERN ACTION ON GENETIC ENGINEERING

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PRESS RELEASE

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HYDERABAD DECLARATION ON GENETIC ENGINEERING IN FOOD & FARMING

**issued after a Round Table on GE in Food and Farming –
Health & Agricultural Concerns
February 3, 2011**

We, medical doctors, nutritionists, agricultural scientists, farmers and civil society activists, after listening to a number of international scientists, doctors and farmer leaders on the health and agricultural Concerns worldwide as a consequence of the introduction of Genetic Engineering in Food and Farming, and discussing the issue in depth at a One Day Round Table held at the National Institute for Rural Development, Hyderabad on Thursday, February 3, 2011, endorse the following HYDERABAD DECLARATION ON GE IN FOOD AND FARMING which we have formulated collectively.

We deeply believe that democratization of debate on Genetic Engineering is the key to save India from the assault on India's food sovereignty by corporate biotech industry through genetic engineering in food and farming. Once people of India understand the myth of genetic engineering as a magic bullet to solve the nation's problems in food and agriculture India can work towards its own food and health sovereignty. It is the responsibility of the State to create such an environment of democratic debate.

We are seriously concerned about the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the current crop of biotechnology related policies being pursued by the Government. The kind of draconian provisions [anybody who criticizes genetic engineering is liable for imprisonment and huge fines] sought to be introduced in the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill is an illustration of this. This is a larger scam than 2-G which sought to loot some spectrum. Through these laws and the public policy measures being initiated, what is being sold out in a corrupt manner but the health of India's environment, safety of its soils, health of its people and the nation's food freedom and democracy. Therefore we call upon all the citizens of this country to wake up this huge threat to their democratic right to decide on the health and safety of their food and participate in a vigorous democratic debate on genetic engineering.

We strongly condemn the insidious efforts of ISAAA to negotiate with the agricultural ministers of different states to introduce GE by the backdoor circumventing the extraordinary public debate that took place on the issue of Bt Brinjal. It is a shame on the democracy of the country that the suspect scientists from the Forum for Promotion of Biotechnology made a public statement that **what should be eaten by the people should be decided by experts and not by people**. Nothing can be a more heinous assault on the freedom of citizens of India than this naked assertion that they don't even have the right to decide what they eat.

We unanimously pledge to mobilize the farmers, consumers and environmental activists and lead them towards a second freedom struggle in order to protect our national sovereignty.

We declare in unison: **Give us our freedom. We will feed the nation forever.**

In the context of these developments

We demand from the Government of India:

- ✓ Considering the proven health hazards to the human and the animal, economic loss to the farmers, loss of biodiversity due to genetic contamination, threat to food sovereignty of the nation participants of this Round Table appeal to the Government of India to make India GM free. At least declare a moratorium on GM crops and foods for the next 50 years till it is convincingly proved that GM crops and foods are not harmful to the people of India, biodiversity and the food sovereignty of the nation.
- ✓ The fundamental principle of health is protection of nature. Therefore in order to safeguard the health of Indian people, stop all research and propagation of GM crops which works against nature
- ✓ No science works against nature and its natural biological evolution. Therefore Genetic Engineering which is fundamentally aimed at altering the natural biological evolution is completely against nature and therefore anti-science
- ✓ Ban all field trials of GE Crops as well as their cultivation in India The historic Bt Brinjal public debate has demonstrated how exercised are the people of this country about the negative consequences of GE crops on the human, soil and environmental health of the nation. Acknowledge and respect this and take this debate to its logical conclusion by banning all GE cultivation in this country including their field trials.
- ✓ In the meanwhile, LABEL all imported food items in order that the citizens of India understand whether they are genetically modified or not.
- ✓ Take up a massive awareness campaign to help Indian people understand the impact of genetically engineered crops on the soil and human health through using public information channels such as All India Radio, Doordarshan and DAVP. Bust the myth surround Genetic Engineering that it is a magic bullet with the capacity to solve India's food and farming problems by making available information in all Indian languages on how GE is an untested, unproven, unsafe technology

In order to strengthen an ecologically safe, vibrant and self reliant Indian agriculture

- ✓ Remove all subsidies on chemical fertilizers and pay the money directly to the farmers to meet the cost of cultivation using methods of their choice
- ✓ Make all state owned seed corporations accountable to the farming community by producing quality seeds and making them available to farmers on demand

- ✓ Incentivise food farming by announcing a series of support measures including cash incentives, support prices, market access for farmers
- ✓ Provide further motivation and support to ecological food farmers through a slew of measures such as ecological bonus, biodiversity bonus and food production bonus which should together amount to a cash incentive of Rs.10000 per acre.
- ✓ Provide fresh mandate and adequate funding to agricultural universities and research stations to reorient their research towards seed sector relevant to our agro-climate zones.
- ✓ Introduce ecological food production into the school and university curriculum so that the GenNext can discover the enormous values of producing their own food and reverse the brain drain by coming back to the villages and farming

We urge the farmers movements and civil society organisations

- ✓ Revive the traditional system of community seed banks and give the initiative of food production back to the farmers. Since this is dependent on the traditional culture and habits, increase an enlightened awareness about the basis and strength of the thought that gave birth to this culture
- ✓ Launch movements to put back biodiversity into agriculture. The rampant monoculture and chemicalisation in Indian farming is an invitation to even more destructive technologies such as genetic engineering. Therefore it is our duty to reverse the chemicalisation and monoculturation of Indian agriculture by putting agrobiodiversity firmly into our farming.
- ✓ Strengthen SAGE through inclusion of more organisations and individuals working against genetic engineering in South India for effective campaign and sharing of information on GE issues.
- ✓ Work towards protecting our traditional knowledge and wisdom. This is our greatest strength. We have to live by our knowledge. Fight collectively for legally protective measures against any infringement / violations of this knowledge. This means preserving our biodiversity, saving and producing local seeds grow crops with freedom. More than anything our inalienable freedom to decide what to grow what to eat and what to grow and how to live.

Endorsed by:

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