

# SOUTHERN ACTION ON GENETIC ENGINEERING

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April 8, 2011

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Today the world observes Joint International GMO Opposition Day observed all over the world by farmers, environmentalists, civil society groups, concerned scientists, doctors and women's groups. This day signifies the way world is waking up to the threat of the Genetic Engineering industry and fighting the new colonialism that it is seeking to impose on the world

In India this comes on the eve of the introduction of BRAI, the most significant legislation in the history of Indian agriculture and food. The tragedy is that a country which discusses a trivial cricket match for months on, has no time to debate what are the implications of a Bill that will affect the food and farming of this nation for generations to come. This is the enormous gap that we need to fill by Democratising the Debate on Genetic Engineering.

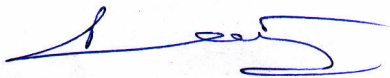
The Southern Action on Genetic Engineering a South India network of over 60 groups representing farmers, scientists, consumers, media and environmental activists is organizing a series of protest marches, public meetings and media conferences in over 15 cities across South India and Orissa. **But more importantly, they are all addressing a letter to all their MLAs and MPs to make their states GM Free and also seeking their endorsement against BRAI.**

On March 15, 2011, the SAGE had organized a Round Table for senior High Court judges from AP, Kerala and Karnataka and Orissa. Chief Justice Sadananda Gowda from Orissa, Justice Goda Raghuram from AP High Court, Justice Anand Byra Reddy from Karnataka High Court and Justice Thottathil B Radhakrishnan from Kerala High Court formed a panel which heard "evidences" from eleven farmers from three South Indian states of AP, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as well as eminent scientists and legal luminaries. The accompanying booklet *What are the South Indian Farmers saying about their Bt Cotton experience?* serves as an eye opener to everyone who has been subsumed by the genetically engineered propaganda of the biotech industry.

What the farmers from AP, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu said as their Bt Cotton experiences and the profound concerns they expressed about the kind of impacts of genetic engineering on their farming was extremely disturbing. It is voices such as these that have been drowned by the powerful multinational biotech industry which has money, clout and media to overwhelm genuine issues of biosafety, colonization of farming and desperation that traps small and poor farmers into an ever increasing cycle of suicides.

Therefore SAGE demands that:

- ☒ There should be an open, transparent and informed national debate that involves very small farmers, environmental activists, independent scientists and consumer groups on the lines of the Bt Brinjal debate.
- ☒ There should be a review of Bt cotton policy countrywide weighting the so called economic benefits which have nothing to do with Bt cotton itself but have a lot to do with the cotton pricing itself. The debate must seriously weigh the impact of Bt cotton farming on the health of the soil, cattle and human beings engaged in its cultivation. An independent commission must be set up to do this assessment of the impact of Bt cotton on Indian farming and biosafety.of Indian environment
- ☒ Indian parliament and legislatures must bring in immediate legislative action to enforce the mandates of national and state seed corporations to provide uncontaminated cotton seeds to farmers who have been completely deprived the options of cultivating non Bt cotton.
- ☒ The proposed bill on Biotechnology Regulatory Authority must be revisited and there should be a new drafting committee that has farmers, consumers and environmentalists in equal measure to the panel to prepare a new draft for presentation to the Parliament. Until this is done the presentation of BRAI before the Parliament should be kept on hold.



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