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Wide Debate Needed On Genetic Engineering Crops

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Hyderabad, February 4: "Genetic Engineering" is not an absolute solution altogether to address the food and farming crises in the country. There was a corporate lobby behind the propagation of the Genetic Engineering as a remedy to these problems, said the director, Deccan Development Society, Mr P V Sathish.

Mr Sathish was speaking at a press conference organised jointly by the DDS and the Southern Action on Genetic Engineering to express deep concern over the GE Regulatory issues that were emerging to promote GE food crops in recent times and to share the "Hyderabad Declaration" adopted at the one day Round Table Conference on "Genetic Engineering in Food and Farming —Health and Agricultural Concerns" at the National Institute of Rural Development, here on February 3.

Mr Sathish said that the Round Table conference believed that the "a wide debate" involving common people in a democratic manner was the key to save the country from the assault on its food sovereignty by corporate biotech industry through genetic engineering in food and farming. It also felt that it was the responsibility of the State to facilitate such a democratic debate. He also said that they strongly condemned the insidious efforts of the ISAAA to negotiate with the agricultural ministers of different states to introduce GE by the backdoor circumventing the public debate that took place in case of the BT Brinjal.

Referring to the public statement "what should be eaten by the people should be decided by experts and not by the people" made by Dr Kameshwar Rao, a scientist of the Forum for Promotion of Biotechnology, he said that it was a shame for a democratic country. Pointing to the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill, he said that it contains some draconian provisions that stipulate imprisonment and huge fines for those who critisises GE, and demanded that it should not be introduced in the parliament.

The director, Institute for Responsible Science, Prof. Jeffrey Smith said that he observed that in about 31 countries the GM crops were introduced due to the force by the corporate sector and also noted that the decisions to be taken in this country on GE crops would depend on those made in the USA. Speaking on ill-effects of the GE crops, he said that it was proved in the USA that they result in liver and kidney damages and itching and rashes for the farm labourers working in GE crops fields. He also said that the third generation may even lose the capacity to give birth to off-springs. He said that there were some cases in which the cattle grazed on GE crop fields have died and the pregnancies were got aborted.

The former director, Kerala Bio-diversity Board, Mr Vijayan, who was instrumental behind Kerala being declared as the first "GM free State" said that the GE would not increase the productivity as it was meant to check a particular pest "Bolnworm" and he also said that there were many conventional methods available in our country to control pests. The most critical ill-effect of it was the genetic contamination, because the insertion of BT gene would wipe out so many traditional varieties, he said and reminded that there were some 36 varieties of Maize in Mexico, and about 80 per cent of them were wiped out due to the BT gene. He also said that more importantly we would lose our food sovereignty to decide as to what to eat since it would be in the hands of multinational companies like Monsanto, if the BT crops were allowed. (NSS)

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