

OPEN LETTER TO CHAIRMAN NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY AUTHORITY

WHY IS THE “CUSTODIAN” OF INDIA’S BIODIVERSITY SUPPORTING AN ANTI-CONSERVATION AGENDA?

To
Dr. S. Kannaiyan
Chairman
National Biodiversity Authority
Chennai

26th January 2008

Subject: Immediate withdrawal of highly biased and anti conservation public statements supporting Genetic Engineering (GE) and invoking Section 36.4 (ii) of the Biological Diversity Act

Sir,

It is with deep shock that we read of your comments made at the *National Seminar on Biodiversity, Bioresources and Biotechnology for Sustainable Livelihood of the Rural Community* held at Chennai last week. Several newspapers have quoted you saying that “...genetically modified crops were the only answer to increase the production and productivity and to solve malnutrition problem in the country”, and that “I am surprised to note that many non-governmental organizations are shouting from rooftops against the introduction of GM crops. They are either ignorant about the ground realities or have some ulterior motive”.

We are even more concerned that these comments have been made by you in your official capacity as the Chairperson of the National Biodiversity Authority which has a critical role in conservation of biological diversity and protection of people’s resources and knowledge to feed and heal themselves in ecologically benign and culturally appropriate ways.

We would like to draw your attention to the very provision of the Biological Diversity Act itself which acknowledges the potential hazards of genetically modified organisms: Section 36.4 (ii) of the Biological Diversity Act 2002, states that:
‘The Central Government shall undertake measures to regulate, manage or control the risks associated with the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology likely to have adverse impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and human health’.

As one of the key custodians of this law you ought to be advising the Central Government on prevention of GMOs as a precautionary measure rather than risk the rich and mega-diverse biodiversity of India and with it the culture and livelihoods of millions of people. Simply put GE (genetic engineering) is antithetical to diversity. It not only perpetrates monocultures, but also unleashes non-tested unnatural products that could cause genetic pollution also compromising the food sovereignty of our people with increasing dependencies on corporate-sponsored “science”. If it is the promotion of GE that is on the agenda of the apex body whose role is for the conservation and sustainable use; then it does not leave communities and peoples movements with much faith in the institution. It is not clear by what authority, in what capacity and with what evidence are you concluding that GM crops are the only solution.

Your statements have also confirmed apprehensions that many in civil society have, regarding the setting up of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) without providing them with the authority and capacity to conserve their biodiversity and protect their knowledge. With this approach we feel that the network of BMCs could well be misused to market GM crops, using the vulnerability of farmers in an already declining farming sector, and over-riding existing diversity in seeds, knowledge and resources. And who knows, with this kind of push, could it also be that the information recorded in PBRs, put into computerized national databases over which communities will have no control, could become accessible to promoters of GM crops, rather than be used to protect and promote the welfare of communities? Given the current disposition of the leadership of the NBA, how can we have any confidence that the NBA will be able to perform its prime role of safeguarding agrobiodiversity and the interests of communities most dependent on such biodiversity?

With your lack of confidence in your own peoples ways we do not think you can expect a reciprocal treatment.

We therefore urge you to:

1. Immediately withdraw your highly biased statements that are unscientific and deeply disrespectful of our peoples’ customs, traditions and practices
2. Render an apology to all the activists who are tirelessly struggling for an objective and independent assessment of genetic engineering in agriculture
3. Immediately invoke the spirit of clause Section 36.4 (ii) and immediately put a stay on grant of clearances for field trials and use of GE crops, as a precautionary conservation measure.

If the above is not acceptable, kindly resign from the post of NBA Chairperson as people have lost their faith in the office whose bias is clearly supporting and safeguarding ideologies which are inherently against conservation.

In anticipation,

Sincerely,

| | Name | Organization / Affiliation | State / Country |
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|-----|----------------------------------|---|----------------|
| 1. | A Gunasekaran | Anantham Ammaippu, Arachalur | Tamil Nadu |
| 2. | A.C.Zonunmawia | Centre for Environment Protection (CEP) | Mizoram |
| 3. | Adv. Narayanan Nambiar | INSAF, Kannur | Kerala |
| 4. | Afsar Jafri | (Anti GM activist) | Mumbai |
| 5. | Anil | Altermedia | Thrissur |
| 6. | Anthony Swamy | CEDA TRUST, Dindugal | Tamilnadu |
| 7. | Anuradha Chandran Maharishi | | |
| 8. | Aruna Rodrigues | Sunray Harvesters | Madhya Pradesh |
| 9. | Arundhati Dhuru & Sandeep Pandey | NAPM | Uttar Pradesh |
| 10. | Ashok Kumar Shetty | Krishikara Vedike, DK and Udipi | Karnataka |
| 11. | Babychen | Organic Bazaar, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 12. | Bandana Mallik | Waterkeeper Alliance in New York | USA. |
| 13. | Bharat Mansata | Earthcare Books, Mumbai | Maharashtra |
| 14. | Brig Oommen John (Retd) | HRD Consultant, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 15. | C Jayasri | AP Coalition in Defence of Diversity | Andhra Pradesh |
| 16. | C N Suresh Kumar | AP Alliance for Food Sovereignty | Andhra Pradesh |
| 17. | C R Neelakantan | Environmentalist | Kerala |
| 18. | C. Udaya Shankar | Centre for World Solidarity, Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 19. | Chandan Mukherjee | SEVA, Kolkatta | West Bengal |

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| 20. | Chandras ekharan Nair | Farmers Internet Forum | Kerala |
| 21. | Chittattin kara Krishna Pillai Vaidyar | Chittattinkara Vaidhyashala, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 22. | D V Sridharan | Point Return | Tamil Nadu |
| 23. | Daniel Kumaran | Venture Trust, Puthukottai | Tamilnadu |
| 24. | Datta Patil | YUVA Rural | Maharashtra |
| 25. | Debjeet Sarangi & Pratap Panda | Living Farms | Orissa |
| 26. | Devinder Sharma | Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security | New Delhi |
| 27. | Dharmara j | Jaiva Karshaka Samithi, Thrissur | Kerala |
| 28. | Dr A Latha | River Research Centre, Thrussur | Kerala |
| 29. | Dr A S K Nair | Scientist, Centre for Earth Science Studies, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 30. | Dr C Sathyama la | Epidemiologist | New Delhi |
| 31. | Dr C. Shambu Prasad | Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar | Orissa |
| 32. | Dr Jeevanan dan | Tamil Nadu Green Movement | Tamil Nadu |
| 33. | Dr Jeevarath nam | Coastal Action Network | Tamilnadu |
| 34. | Dr K Swarnalat ha | Nagercoil Women's Consumer Protection Centre | Tamilnadu |
| 35. | Dr Kaladhara n | Tamil Nadu Consumer Protection Council, Nagapatinam | Tamilnadu |
| 36. | Dr R S Lalmohan | Nature Conservation Trust ,Nagercoil | Tamilnadu |
| 37. | Dr Sharachc handra | Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment & Development, Bangalore | Karnataka |

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| | Lele | | |
| 38. | Dr Suman Sahai | Gene Campaign | Delhi |
| 39. | Dr Thomas Varghese | Chairman, | Kerala |
| 40. | Dr. A. Bijukumar | University of Kerala, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 41. | Dr. Arun Mani Dixit | | Gujarat |
| 42. | Dr. Debal Deb | Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies | West Bengal |
| 43. | Dr. Duraisingam | FEDCOT | Tamil Nadu |
| 44. | Dr. Ilina Sen | Rupantar | Chattisgarh |
| 45. | Dr. N. Chandramohanakumar | Professor & Head, Dept of Chemical Oceanography CUSAT, Kochi 16 | Kerala |
| 46. | Dr. Narasimha Reddy | Centre for Handloom Information and Policy, Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 47. | Dr. R. Sukanya | Community Health Cell, Bangalore | Karnataka |
| 48. | Dr. S. G. Kabra | SDM Hospital, Jaipur | Rajasthan |
| 49. | Dr. S. Santhi | Independent Scientist, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 50. | Dr.G. Nammalvar | Tamil Nadu Organic Agriculturalists Movement | Tamil Nadu |
| 51. | G Kannan | Consumer Care Centre, Virudhunagar. | Tamilnadu |
| 52. | G Varadarajan | Waves Foundation, Tiruvarur | Tamilnadu |
| 53. | G. John | Thread | Orissa |
| 54. | G. Srinivas | Samata | Andhra Pradesh |
| 55. | Gaurav Sahai | | Punjab |
| 56. | Geo Jose | NAPM, Kochi | Kerala |
| 57. | Gopal Reddy | Voluntary Associations Network of Anantapur | Andhra Pradesh |
| 58. | Hariharan | Secretary, Kissan Jyothi Farmers Club, (membership of 1050 farmers), Wyanad | Kerala |

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| 59. | Hemavathi C | President, Karavali Mahila Jagrathi Vedike | Karnataka |
| 60. | Jacob Lazer | PUCL, Kochi | Kerala |
| 61. | Jagannath Chatterjee | Manitham / Loksatta Bhubaneswar | Orissa |
| 62. | Jaya Iyer | | New Delhi |
| 63. | Jayakumar, C | Zero Waste Centre, Kovalam, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 64. | Jebra Ram Muchahary | Chief President, ICITP Guwahati, | Assam |
| 65. | John Jo Varghese | Subject Matter Specialist (Agronomy), Mitraniketan K.V.K, Vellanad, Thiruvananthapuram | Kerala |
| 66. | K Gangadharan | President, Paddy Collective, Wyanad | Kerala |
| 67. | K Jogi Naidu | Sustainable Agriculture Group | Andhra Pradesh |
| 68. | K Nimmaiah | Deccan Development NGOs Network | Andhra Pradesh |
| 69. | K P Rama Rao | Neelgiri Civil Society Organisations Network | Andhra Pradesh |
| 70. | K Somnath Naik | Nagarika Seva Trust, | Karnataka |
| 71. | Kanchi Kohli, Ashish Kothari | Kalpavriksh | Delhi |
| 72. | Kavitha Kuruganti & Dr G V Ramanjaneyulu | Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 73. | Kisan Mehta, Priya Salvi | Save Bombay Committee and Prakruti | Maharashtra |
| 74. | Kishan Rao Parcha | "Sukshetram", Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 75. | Krishna Prasad | Sahaja Samrudha, Bangalore | Karnataka |
| 76. | Krishna Srinivasan | ECONET | Maharashtra |
| 77. | Kuppusamy | Organic Farmers Federation of Kolathur | Tamil Nadu |

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| 78. | L Loganathan | Thiruvarur District Fisheries Labour Union | Tamilnadu |
| 79. | Linn Cohen-Cole | Atlanta, Georgia | USA |
| 80. | Madhu Sarin | Chandigarh | Punjab |
| 81. | Madhumita Dutta | Corporate Accountability Desk-The Other Media | Delhi |
| 82. | Mr James | Consumer Association of Tamilnadu, Paramakudi | Tamilnadu |
| 83. | Ms Baghyalakshmi | All women consumer Association, Madurai | Tamilnadu |
| 84. | N Badhushah | Wayanad Environment Protection Council, Sulthan Bathery | Kerala |
| 85. | Nagarajan | Bharathi Women's Development Society, Thiruvarur | Tamilnadu |
| 86. | Nageshwar Rao | CRDS, Khammam | Andhra Pradesh |
| 87. | Nalini Naik | Gen Secy, SEWA, Kerala | Kerala |
| 88. | Nandita Shah, Deepak Suchde | SHARAN, Mumbai | Maharashtra |
| 89. | Neesha Noronha | Independent | Maharashtra |
| 90. | Oswald Quintal | Kudumbam - LEISA Network | Tamil Nadu |
| 91. | P.V. Satheesh | Deccan Development Society | Andhra Pradesh |
| 92. | Pandiode Prabhakaran | National Farmers Protection Committee, Palakkad | Kerala |
| 93. | Prakash P Gopinath | Sahayathri | Kerala |
| 94. | Prof Arun Kumar | CESP, SSS, JNU | New Delhi |
| 95. | Prof Durai Singam | Chairman, FEDCOT (and 260 affiliated Consumer groups in all districts of Tamilnadu and Pondicherry) | Tamilnadu and Pondicherry |
| 96. | Prof S Peermohammed | Kanyakumari District Consumers' Federation, Nagercoil | Tamilnadu |
| 97. | Prof. Arif | Association of Management | Andhra Pradesh |

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| | A. Waqif, | Development Institutions in South Asia, Hyderabad | |
| 98. | Prof. M K Prasad | Chairman and MD, Information Kerala Mission, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 99. | Prof. M S Rathore | Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur | Rajasthan |
| 100. | Purushan Eloor | Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi, Kochi | Kerala |
| 101. | R Ponnambalam | CREATE Trust, Paramakudi | Tamilnadu |
| 102. | R. Santhana m | | New Delhi |
| 103. | Radha HB | Consultant, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of | |
| 104. | Raghu Velankar | | Maharashtra |
| 105. | Raj | Human Rights Association of India, Nagercoil. | Tamilnadu |
| 106. | Raj K. Sadosh | | |
| 107. | Rajesh Krishnan | Greenpeace India | Karnataka |
| 108. | Ramesan Kuruvayil | Farmer, Kannur | Kerala |
| 109. | Robin C | Keraleeyam, Thrissur | Kerala |
| 110. | S Guruvayurappan | Wildlife Preservation Society of India - South Zone | Kerala |
| 111. | S Kiran | South Against Genetic Engineering | Andhra Pradesh |
| 112. | S Poongudi | Vithu Trust | Tamil Nadu |
| 113. | S R Sreeram | Consumer -Human Rights Protection Centre | Tamilnadu |
| 114. | Samson Jaykar | Medak District Voluntary Associations Network | Andhra Pradesh |
| 115. | Sanjay Maharishi | | New Delhi |
| 116. | Saraswati Kavula | Film Maker, Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 117. | Saroop Roy | Equations, Trivandrum | Kerala |
| 118. | Sasikumar | Malabar Natural History Society, Kozhikode | Kerala |
| 119. | Satheesh Sathyavartan | SAMVADA | Karnataka |

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| 120. | Sathyana ayana | Mangosan, Dakshina Kannada | Karnataka |
| 121. | Selvam Ramaswa my | Organic Farmers' Federation of Erode district | Tamil Nadu |
| 122. | Shalini Bhutani | GRAIN | Delhi |
| 123. | Sheelu Francis | Tamil Nadu Women's Collectives | Tamil Nadu |
| 124. | Shree Padre | Farm Journalist | Kerala/Karnataka |
| 125. | Smt Sugathak umari | Poet / Environmentalist | Kerala |
| 126. | Sri John Master | Vasundhara, Sulthan Bathery | Kerala |
| 127. | Sridhar Radhakris hnan | Thanal | Kerala |
| 128. | Subhash Mehta | ICAP, Bangalore | Karnataka |
| 129. | Sudheerk umar P V | Kasaragod Paristhithi Samrakshana Samithi | Kerala |
| 130. | Sumeet Varma | | |
| 131. | T P Padhman abhan | SEEK, Payannur | Kerala |
| 132. | Tmt Jesurathn am | Law Trust, Nagapattinam | Tamilnadu |
| 133. | Umendra Dutt | Kheti Virasat Mission | Punjab |
| 134. | Umesh Nirmal | President - DK, Parisara Sakthara Okkutta | Karnataka |
| 135. | Umesh Varma P. | Forum for Better Hyderabad | Andhra Pradesh |
| 136. | Usha Seethalak shmi | (Freelance consultant, Hyderabad) | Andhra Pradesh |
| 137. | Usha, S | Save Our Rice Campaign, Thanal | Kerala |
| 138. | Vanaja Ramprasa d | Green Foundation | Karnataka |
| 139. | Varghese Thodupar ambil | Kerala Karshaka Munnettam | Kerala |
| 140. | Vasavi | (Freelance journalist and activist) | Jharkhand |

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| | Kiro | | |
| 141. | Venu Madhav | SECURE, Khammam | Andhra Pradesh |
| 142. | Vijay Jardhari | Beej Bacchao Andolan | Uttarakhand |
| 143. | Vijay Jawandhia | Shetkari Sangathana | Maharashtra |
| 144. | Vimal Bhai | Matu Peoples' organisation | Uttarakhand |
| 145. | Viren Desai | Photographer | |
| 146. | Y Srikar | Telangana Natural Resource Management Group | Andhra Pradesh |

CC: Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, New Delhi
Meena Gupta, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests
K.Venkatraman, Member Secretary, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA),
Chennai
Chairpersons of all State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)