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Dear Shri Jaipal Reddyji,

**Sub: Seeking withdrawal of the BRAI (Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India) Bill – reg.**

Greetings! I had written in the past to the Prime Minister with regard to the serious flaws in the BRAI Bill. It is learnt with a lot of disappointment that the Government of India and your Ministry in particular went ahead with the tabling of the Bill, despite objections raised by Parliamentarians, civil society groups and even state governments. The Bill that was introduced by you on April 22<sup>nd</sup> in the Lok Sabha did not even undergo serious pre-legislative consultations.

India is walking into drafting a statute for regulation of modern biotechnology flowing out of its commitment in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As you are well aware, the Ministry of Environment & Forests is the nodal ministry for this. In such a context, the Ministry of Science & Technology tabling this regulatory bill is unacceptable. The other reason of objection is also related to the inherent conflict of interest that is present, given that your Ministry is one of the promoting ministries (like the Ministry of Agriculture).

In the past too, concerns with regard to the violation of the federal polity, as seen in this Bill, have been raised – state governments have a constitutional authority over agriculture, and this Bill tries to negate this. It appears that the current resistance against transgenic crops and foods by state governments does not suit the Union Government's corporate-friendly policies (given that this kind of push for transgenic will ultimately benefit not our farmers but only profiteering corporations) and the Centre would like to steamroller the state governments into accepting GMOs being thrust through a fast-track, single-window clearance system.

It is a matter of great concern that regulation that has been evolving, with some improvements seen especially during the debate around Bt brinjal, is now going to take many steps back with this BRAI Bill. Transparency, long term and independent assessment of bio-safety and other implications of transgenic crops and foods, respecting the federal polity, public participation and careful weighing of policy options were all hallmarks of decision-making at that time. How can the country

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afford to go back on democratic improvements in regulatory systems through this BRAI Bill?

As you are aware, many analysts have called this 'the wrong bill for the wrong reasons by the wrong people' – this includes some senior and well-respected scientists of the country.

However, the BRAI Bill that was hastily introduced on April 22<sup>nd</sup> chose to ignore all the valid concerns expressed on the subject to the PMO and your ministry over the past 3 years.

Further, the recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, tabled in the Parliament in August 2012 on the subject of GM crops in general, but also the regulatory regime in particular, are also being ignored. This is very undemocratic and unacceptable. The Standing Committee had expressly said that this country does not need a BRAI but an umbrella Bio-safety Authority and asked for a new statute to be brought in for setting up such a Bio-safety Authority, after extensive public consultations, along the lines of the Norwegian Gene Technology Act.

I believe that the government should withdraw this Bill – it is not too late even now; the Government should instead bring in a Bio-safety Protection Legislation, the broad contours of which have already been recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

  
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