

We Demand a permanent ban on Endosulfan in India

PRESS RELEASE

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Swadhikar-National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights is deeply concerned about the reluctance of the Union Government to take proactive steps towards the immediate ban on Endosulfan. In spite of the strong evidence regarding the dangerous consequences of the use of this pesticide, and despite numerous pleas from the victims as well as a well informed recommendation by the NHRC, it is extremely distressing that the Government has not shown any sense of urgency in this matter. There are over 9000 people who have already been directly affected, of whom at least 4800 are known to be bed-ridden. The genetic impact on the reproductive systems is also becoming clear as more and more infants are born with deformations.

Till date we have not heard any statement showing grave concern from the senior ministers regarding this disaster; rather the government has been defending the use of this dangerous pesticide. It is painful to hear the Minister of Environment and Forests uttering words such as: "It is true that Endosulfan is banned in 60 countries; but it is not banned in 40 countries"; and the Agriculture Minister reportedly supporting the use of this pesticide. It is time that the Government of India compares itself with the countries in the world with the most progressive policies and the best human rights records, and not those countries that may be controlled by anti-people corporate interests. If the government has to choose between a pro-people / pro-victim stand and a pro-industry stand, then it goes without saying that it has to be uncompromisingly with the people, the victims.

As national coalition that exists to struggle for Dalit rights *Swadhikar-NCDHR* recognizes that the victims of such disasters are always from the most disadvantaged sections of the society, particularly Dalits. The callousness of the Government in these matters betrays discrimination by default; attitudes that the poor are dispensable. We vehemently condemn such attitudes that emanate from a socio-political system that is fundamentally casteist and biased against the Dalits in particular and the poor in general.

We therefore demand:

- 1. Immediate and permanent ban on Endosulfan in India**
- 2. Appropriate relief, rehabilitation and compensation to the survivors of Endosulfan tragedy to be announced immediately, implemented / disbursed in time-bound manner.**
- 3. Immediate constitution of a time-bound inquiry into all acts of omission and commission that caused the Endosulfan tragedy followed by criminal prosecution of all actors – corporate and government – responsible for this disaster. The inquiry should be by a competent team headed by a sitting judge of the High Court assisted by independent experts as well as by senior officers with investigative capabilities (such as from the CBI).**

4. Initiate nation-wide consultations on the policy and legislative measures that need to be taken to prevent such tragedies in the future. These consultations should examine the weaknesses of the current policy / legal regime and the extent of compliance with the International Conventions like the Stockholm Convention, leading to concrete recommendations on policies and laws that need to be enacted, and thereafter initiate a legislative process in the Parliament.

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