

Seed producing units asked not to employ children

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HYDERABAD: The two-day National Seed Association of India Conference, which began in the city on Tuesday, had child rights protection forums and civil society organisations demanding freedom for over 5 lakh children working in hybrid seed production.

Taking serious note of the continued employment of a large number of children in hybrid seed production activities, they appealed to all the seed producing companies not to engage children in their operations.

"Today seed companies, both Indian and MNCs, are holding their conclave here in Hyderabad. Before they deliberate on the growth of their business, they should declare that they will not employ children and disassociate themselves with those who employ children," said Y Rajendra Prasad, coordinator, M V Foundation at a press briefing on Tuesday.

Group of NGOs, who submitted a representation in this regard to the director of the National Seed Association of India on Tuesday evening, stated that a countrywide survey conducted in 2009-10 revealed that more than 5 lakh children were working in hybrid cotton, chili, tomato and okra seed cultivation. Of these, more than 60 per cent were girls. The members said that the children were made to work long hours in harsh conditions and were exposed to harmful pesticides on a daily basis.

Activists said that local seed producers are ensuring a steady flow of child labourers by extending advances and loans to parents in exchange for long-term contracts. "Even though parents might want to send their children to schools, they feel obliged to the farmers because of the advances they receive," said Prasad. The groups recommended termination of contracts of those who engage children in their work.

(original article: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Three-children-drowned-in-a-water-tank-in-Kakinada-while-three-others-were-feared-drowned-when-their-boat-capsized-in-West-Godavari-district-on-Tuesday/articleshow/7550825.cms>)