

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
AT THE GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM ON FARMERS' RIGHTS**

New Delhi, September 12, 2023

It gives me immense pleasure to attend this august gathering for the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights which is taking up the issues closest to my heart. Since my childhood, I have been taught to live in harmony with nature. The wide range of biodiversity, wildlife and varieties of exotic plants and creatures have always enriched our lives and made this planet beautiful.

In this context, I say with conviction that our farmers since the beginning of civilisation are the real engineers and scientists. They have harnessed the energies and bounties of nature for the benefit of humanity. A Nobel laureate and economist while visiting a village in Bihar once remarked "Indian farmers are better than scientists". I entirely agree with this statement as in agriculture, we have seamlessly blended tradition with technology.

As you all know, agriculture is the first vocation known to humankind. And it thrived on agro-biodiversity that Mother Nature has given us. The farming fraternity of the world is its foremost conserver. You are the true guardians of crop diversity. Though I know that we have lost many plants and species, we all must appreciate your endeavour to protect and revive many varieties of plants and species whose existence is crucial to all of us.

Dear Delegates,

I am happy that the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) has chosen India as the venue of the First Global symposium on Farmers' Rights, and appropriately so, as

India is an ancient civilisation where our traditions, culture and agriculture are part of the same fabric.

This is the land which has internalised, since ages, the concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”, meaning that “the entire world is one family”. I welcome all of you to this sacred land which has abiding faith in well-being of every creature of the nature. Our ancient scriptures guide us with widely benevolent teachings of:

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः, सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु, मा कश्चित् दुःख भाग्भवेत्॥

It means: “May all be prosperous and happy, may all be free from illness, may all see what is spiritually uplifting and may no one suffer.”

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), India is a mega-diverse country with only 2.4 percent of the world's land area but accounts for 7-8 percent of all recorded species of plants and animals. There are about for 45,000 species of plants, which is about 7 percent of the world's total. In terms of biodiversity, India ranks as one of nations endowed with widest range of plants and species.

This rich agro-biodiversity of India has been a treasure trove for the global community at large. Our farmers have toiled and enterprisingly conserved local varieties of plants, domesticated wild plants and nurtured traditional varieties that have provided the building blocks for different crop breeding programmes. This has ensured the food and nutritional security for human beings and animals. The area specific varieties of crops are closely associated with society and culture and often contain medicinal properties.

Agricultural research and technology development has enabled the country to multiply production of food grains, horticulture, fisheries, milk and eggs many times since 1950-51, thus making a visible impact on the national food and nutrition security. The efforts of our agro-biodiversity conservers and industrious farmers, scientists and policy

makers coupled with governmental support have played a key role in giving fillip to multiple agricultural revolutions in the country. All of them are worthy of our unreserved praise and respect for achieving this incredible feat. This is important as in the raging debate of food sovereignty versus food security, I firmly believe that the technology and science can serve as an effective protector and enhancer of heritage knowledge.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ITPGRFA signed in 2001 was one of the most important international agreements among member countries to conserve, use, and manage plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. For the first time it talked about guaranteeing food security through conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

India had taken a lead in introducing the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act (PPVFR) 2001 which is aligned to the ITPGRFA to protect our farmers. My country provides a range of rights to farmers including use, re-use, save, share and sell the unbranded seeds of a registered variety. Besides, Indian farmers can register their own varieties which get protection. Such an Act can serve as an excellent model worthy of emulation for the entire world. It gains further importance in the wake of challenges posed by climate change and also to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations as our collective responsibility towards humanity. The climate change challenge has put an onus on conservation of our traditional farmers' varieties including those of millets which are not only endowed with inherent tolerance to various stresses on our ecosystem but also hold within themselves the nutritional profile that could be the key in providing a solution to the food and health requirements of a large proportion of human and livestock population. The declaration of the year 2023 as the Year of Millets by the United Nations is a step in this direction.

Dear Delegates,

This symposium, the very first of its kind in the world, provides a golden opportunity to the world fraternity in realigning their priorities and programmes according to the needs of humanity and to make a common commitment. I hope this Symposium would be a milestone in further taking significant steps towards our commitment for fulfillment of farmers' rights world over.

I am glad to learn that this event also includes various categories of awards for communities and individuals in recognition of their enormous contribution as saviour of the plant genome. I have no hesitation in saying that by saving, preserving and nurturing biodiversity, you are not only saving humanity but the entire planet. I watched a powerful three-minute film titled "The Guardian of the Mighty Little Seeds". It begins as a seed aptly describes itself, saying "I am tiny but I am mighty, I am tiny but I give birth to so many." You, as the guardians of these little seeds, are bestowed with exceptional power and responsibility. I wish more power to you!

Thank you all,

Jai Kisan!

Jai Hind!