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## PRESS RELEASE

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Millet Sisters from across the country have demanded that Millets be acknowledged as women's heritage crops considering their 'extraordinary value for providing food, nutrition, livelihood and ecological security in our climate stressed times'.

The Millet Sisters, 'small scale women farmers who grow millet anchored biodiverse crops on their small farms', met on May 23 and 24 in Shillong, Meghalaya for the first National Convention of their All India Millet Sisters Network (AIMS-Network). It may be recalled that the network had been recently honoured by President of India by awarding them the Nari Shakti Puraskar.

'Government must offer priority support to millet based biodiverse agriculture practiced by millions of small women farmers who are custodians of India's rich lore of millet farming practices' demanded Millet Sisters.

Another major demand included in their '*Umiam Declaration of Millet Sisters*' is 'it is imperative that millets should be the center piece of the government's Public Distribution System (PDS) so that India can escape the ignominy of occupying 177<sup>th</sup> rank among the malnourished countries of the world.

As mothers and women concerned with the wellness of children across the country, the millet sisters have urged the government to accord primacy for millet foods in the ICDS and school meal programmes. This, they hope will ensure a healthy new generation.

A series of government actions demanded by the millet sisters to support the women millet farmers include

- a) Helping women collectives to set up affordable millet processing units
- b) Setting up of community based procurement centers that can be easily accessed and controlled by women farmers.
- c) Ensuring that millet farming is supported by MNREGS programme.

The network has demanded support for public research that focuses on traditional knowledge on millet cultivation particularly held by women.

**The AIMS network has taken strong exception to the Indian Institute of Millet Research 'hobnobbing' with genetic engineering and have demanded that IIMR ' focus on the enormous wealth of women's knowledge on millet ecology which is a great national asset.'**

The AIMS has also called upon all the agricultural research bodies to urgently work on the economic valuation of millet ecology in their research program. Finally while appreciating the government for bestowing awards on peasant women farmers for their signal contribution to millet farming they have also demanded that government must not stop at these awards but concede the demands by them which shall be the true honor the peasant women farmers of millets.

Please see enclosed ***Umiam Declaration of Millet Sisters***

***P V Satheesh***

***Director, Deccan Development Society***

***National Convenor, Millet Network of India***