

**ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION**  
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**Date: 29<sup>th</sup> March , 2010**

To,  
**Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad,**  
**Hon'ble Minister of Health & Family Welfare ,**  
**Govt of India,**  
**New Delhi**

**MEMORANDUM**

**Dear Shri Azadji,**

AIDWA would like to bring to your attention the deeply disturbing reports as regards the HPV vaccination programme that has been launched with young tribal girls in certain districts of AP, and Gujarat, with the approval of the State government, and the ICMR. Though the vaccination's efficacy in preventing cervical cancer amongst pre puberty girls, as claimed by its producers, Merck, Sharpe, and Dohme is still unproven, the drug Gardasil has been allowed to be administered in some backward districts of our country under the aegis of PATH, (one of the world's largest health care NGOs) as a demonstration project from July 2009.

Reports show that in Khammam district of AP alone, 14,000 girls were identified - a large percentage of them from poor, tribal families — for vaccination with three doses of Gardasil. The three zones selected in the district were Thirumalayapalem (urban), Kothagudem (rural) and Bhadrachalam (tribal). There was virtually no dissemination of information before the actual vaccination about the nature of the drug or its side effects. Unfortunately, the District Collector also does not appear to have recognized the importance of educating the target group before they were vaccinated, or to assess the implications of adverse side effects amongst them.

The Andhra state unit of AIDWA brought the issue to the attention of the authorities, after the deaths of two young tribal girls - Sode Sayamma and Kudumula Saritha- were registered as suicides due to poison by the local police, when in fact these deaths were related to the administration of the HPV vaccine. As per present reports, four tribal girls have lost their lives as a result of the side effects linked to the drug. Many more girls have been, and are still suffering from severe headache, stomach ache, and vomiting. Far from responding to these serious developments, the authorities have been engaged in finding alternate reasons for the deaths, to escape from the consequences of their callousness.

AIDWA would like to register its strong objection to the entire programme, making guinea pigs of our poor tribal girls, the lack of precautionary measures, and the subsequent attempts being

made to cover up the real situation. We would like to raise some pertinent questions that the Health Ministry must address such as

- What is the criterion on which the target population for the vaccine was selected? We would particularly like a clarification on the choice of young tribal girls from rural areas for this programme.
- Was there a proper procedure to obtain "informed consent?" We would like some details about the discussions with parents of minors, and whether they knew about the possible range of adverse side-effects.
- What was the screening mechanism put in place to monitor those who had been administered the vaccine?
- We are also keen to know about the booster requirements, and the payment for the same. What would be the cost of these booster doses?
- Has there been any cost/ benefit study made to assess the suitability of introducing an expensive vaccine like Gardasil in India?

Sir, AIDWA believes that tribal children cannot be the means for MNCs to promote their vaccines. This constitutes shocking criminal negligence on the part of the authorities to permit such a large programme outside the public health service system. We need immediate government intervention to prevent such shocking occurrences from getting repeated.

In this context, AIDWA demands that

- the government should set up an inquiry into the deaths of the tribal girls and also into the side effects of the vaccine on other girls so that responsibility can be fixed and suitable action taken.
- the State Government should take appropriate action including providing compensation to the families who have lost their children and to the children suffering side-effects. All those suffering from side effects should be identified and provided proper medical treatment free of cost.
- A national policy must be put in place to regulate any such medical interventions and unless proved totally safe, no such drugs should be administered.
- The Government should put a stop to any similar programmes in other areas also.

Sir, we urge you take action immediately, and await your reply on the steps taken.

We would be grateful for an appointment to discuss the matter with you further.

With thanks,

Sd/

**Subhashini Ali**  
(President)

Sd/-

**Sudha Sundararaman**  
(General Secretary)