

# Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)

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Feb 2, 2011  
Dr. Kapil Sibal  
Hon'ble Minister of HRD  
Government of India  
New Delhi.

**Sub: Concerns regarding misuse of public education system by commercial interests**

Dear Dr Sibal,

We, the Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI), are dismayed to learn about the unholy alliance of four state-run publically funded universities with a MNC food company Nestle in different parts of India. The said MNC has entered in a 'secret' MoU with Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) Ludhiana; and others like National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal, Haryana; University of Mysore in Karnataka; and the GB Pant University for Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand, under which Nestle and the University agreed to leverage each others expertise in creating health and nutrition awareness of village women and girls in government schools in rural areas.

The MoU signed by Nestle with PAU states "This MoU, its existence and all information exchanged between the parties under this MoU or during the negotiations preceding this MoU is confidential to them and may not be shared with a third party." The MoU further prevents sharing of the contents of the programme as the letter from Nestle to University clearly states that contents "are of commercial and confidential nature and the disclosure of which may harm our competitive position".

We strongly believe that commercial entities like Nestle exploit such partnerships to promote their image and brands, which includes artificial milk, and snacks as fast foods. The intent to target adolescent girls in India for commercial gains has been expressed publically by the Vice President of Public Affairs of Nestlé in a meeting in London in May 2010, where he said "...This is important to us because it's consumer demand of demanding better nutrition products that's going to make us a successful business. Even educating and tying it to our supply chain of the milk districts in India, within each one of these milk villages, we provide one clean water to the school, but now we've started a programme to educate teenage girls on good nutrition before they get married and become pregnant, because that's where we think we have to start, really - before the woman even becomes pregnant. So we strongly believe in the power of education...."

The MoU between Nestle and Indian Public Sector Universities is particularly reprehensible as Nestle is facing a criminal case in India for violation of the *Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 as amended in 2003. (IMS Act)*.

The Alliance Against Conflicts of interests (AACI) strongly condemns such collaborations of food MNCs with public funded educational institutes to educate girls and women about food and nutrition, which is a ploy to exploit them for commercial gains. Moreover the Punjab Agricultural University violated RTI Act by letting the company know the details about the person who asked this question and University officials toed the line with Nestle. Once again we condemn this attitude of the University.

Further, we believe that any MoU between public departments, organisations and institutions and the private sector should be in the public domain.

We request you to:

1. Ask the Vice- Chancellors of the said universities to explain why such collaboration was required, why the universities signed such a MoU, which restricted them from sharing information with the public and why the curriculum of the programme kept secret.

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2. Please let us know the reasons why these academic institutions have agreed to provide their name and outreach to such a 'commercial' activity.
3. Please take necessary steps to prevent such partnerships in future in the public interest. One such action could be inclusion of guidance under the National Council for Higher Education and Research making such collaborations illegal.

We would like to meet you to further discuss this issue and look forward to hearing from you for suitable time for this purpose.

Sincerely,

We are:

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