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Press Release

Over 1 Lakh Tobacco Farmers Sign Appeal to Prime Minister Urging Inclusion in WHO – FCTC COP7

- Demand policy makers to promote balanced regulations to safeguard the interests and livelihood of millions of small farmers and rural workers

New Delhi, September 29, 2016: Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), a non-profit organization representing the cause of millions of farmers of commercial crops across the States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat etc. submitted an appeal signed by over 1,00,000 (1 Lakh) tobacco farmers to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. The appeal urges the Prime Minister and the Government of India to include the tobacco farmers in the official Indian delegation to the upcoming WHO FCTC COP7.

The appeal is a demonstration of disappointment and resentment towards WHO–FCTC regulations. It requests the Government to reject the extreme FCTC proposals, which are not evidence-based. The farmers plead with the policy makers to promote balanced regulations to safeguard the interests and livelihood of millions of small farmers and rural workers and their families.

The WHO is holding the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of Parties (COP7) Meeting in India from 7-12 November, 2016. Adhoc decisions on tobacco control at this Conference, as in previous such Meetings, will affect the livelihood of millions of tobacco farmers and farm labourers involved in tobacco cultivation in the country.

The appeal has also been submitted to various concerned Ministries such as the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Finance etc.

As a representative of the tobacco farmers in India, FAIFA has also applied to the WHO FCTC Secretariat to give observer status to tobacco farmers in the FCTC COP7. This will allow farmers', one of the key stakeholders of the tobacco community, to understand the future course of actions being proposed by the WHO on tobacco control and the impact of these measures on their tobacco crops. The applications and requests of the farmers have not been acknowledged by the W.H.O and it seems that the UN agency wants to pursue the conference in a non-inclusive manner.

Shri B.V. Javare Gowda, President, Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) said, *“A democratic and participative approach in the formation of the Indian delegation to COP7 will ensure that the farmers and the Industry view point on various proposals arising out of the COP7 Agenda is taken cognizance of and no unilateral and discriminatory one-sided decision is taken by the Parties to the Conference that is hostile to the livelihood of millions dependent on tobacco in India.”*

FCTC itself, through its Guiding Principles, propagates and promotes transparency, and participation of all constituents and stakeholders in its procedures. The Guideline Principle states, “the importance of technical and financial assistance to aid the economic transition of tobacco growers and workers whose livelihoods are seriously affected as a consequence of tobacco control programmes in developing

country Parties, as well as Parties with economies in transition, should be recognized and addressed in the context of nationally developed strategies for sustainable development”.

In fact, the Preamble to the FCTC recognizes the need to consider the livelihood and economic interests of tobacco growers and workers in implementing its provisions: “Mindful of the social and economic difficulties that tobacco control programmes may engender in the medium and long term in some developing countries and countries with economies in transition...”

Mr. Murali Babu, General Secretary, Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), added, *“The participation of farmers in the FCTC COP7 deliberations will be in line with the principles of transparency and equity as propagated by the United Nations itself. However, these principles have been completely disregarded by W.H.O in its past conferences and it is unfortunate that they want to keep the upcoming conference closed door as well. The undemocratic posturing of WHO has gone to such an extent that the media is also not being allowed to cover the proceedings.”*

Such undemocratic FCTC–COP7 meetings is not good for India’s reputation which values transparency and democracy. It will certainly be a black mark on the Government and our Country.

Through this Media conference the farming community, with folded hands, requests the Prime Minister of India to direct the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare to include tobacco farmers in the Indian official delegation and facilitate their participation in the WHO – FCTC COP7 meeting.

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