



Date : August 9, 2016

Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister
Government of India
New Delhi.

Hon'ble Sir,

Sub : Tobacco Farmers Right to Participate in the WHO FCTC COP7 Deliberations

The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) is a non-profit federation whose mission is to support the farmers in India. Tobacco growers all over the world share similar problems, threats and challenges, regardless of the size of their crop production. FAIFA defends tobacco farmers' right to be represented nationally & internationally, to ensure that the issues & challenges faced by them are justly considered by the decision-makers.

The WHO is holding the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Conference of Parties (COP7) in India from 7th to 12th November 2016. The decisions on tobacco control at this Conference, as in previous such meetings, will have grave effect on the livelihood of millions of tobacco farmers and farm labour connected with tobacco cultivation in the country.

As representatives of the tobacco farmers in India and in view of the fact that the COP7 is being hosted by India, we wish to make an urgent appeal that farmers should be allowed to participate in the deliberations of the Conference as a part of the official Indian delegation. Our participation will enable us to contribute to the process and help us understand the future course of actions being proposed by the WHO on tobacco control and the impact of these measures on the tobacco crop cultivated by us and the livelihood of millions that are dependent on tobacco in the country.

The United Nations, in its recommendation on Good Governance states that *"in the community of nations, governance is considered "good" and "democratic" to the degree in which a country's institutions and processes are transparent."* It further states that *"Good governance promotes equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability and the rule of law, in a manner that is effective, efficient and enduring."* Therefore, the participation of farmers in the FCTC COP deliberations will be in keeping with the principles of transparency and equity as adopted by the United Nations itself.

Moreover, the 'Guidance Note of the Secretary-General (UN Secretary General) on Democracy' very clearly enunciates that *"Popular participation, collective deliberation and political equality are essential to democracy, and should be realized through a framework and structure of accessible, representative, transparent and accountable institutions subject to periodic change or renewal."*

In fact, Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, under whose auspices the FCTC COP7 is being held, at the Measurement and Accountability for Results Health Summit, Washington, DC, USA, 9 June 2015 has gone on record to pronounce that *"In this day and age, where transparency is such a big commodity, there is no other option but to have transparency and accountability.... The emphasis on transparency, accountability, and measureable results is increasing every day."* Dr. Chan's statement above reinforces the UN principles of transparency, democratic processes and participation.

Participation of farmers in the COP7 would also be in line with the 'Policy and Recommendations on Economically Sustainable Alternatives to Tobacco Growing (in relation to Article 17 and 18 of the WHO FCTC)' *Guiding Principle 2*, which states that *"Tobacco growers and workers should be engaged in the process of policy development concerning Article 17 and 18 and involved in implementation, in accordance with national laws, through a bottom up and territorial approach, making sure that their involvement is insulated from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry."*



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It is our submission that the inclusion of farmers in the official delegation to the FCTC COP7 and giving them the right to participate in the policy-making process will be in line with the high ideals of the democratic spirit of the Indian Constitution as well. This will also give the representatives of the tobacco farmer community the opportunity to voice their views on any proposal at the Conference or any agreement that the Government of India may enter into which affects the occupation and livelihood of tobacco farmers in the country.

Allowing tobacco farmers, access to the COP 7 to take part in the deliberations will underline the principle of transparency which is required in any public policy-making process and underscore the inclusiveness and fairness of the global health body. .

Moreover, by including farmer representatives in the official delegation to the Conference, the Government of India, which is partnering with the WHO to hold the FCTC COP7 meeting, will reinforce the principle set-out in the 'Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy', which mandates that any proposed legislation, including subordinate legislation that affects a specific group of people must be given "wider publicity to reach the affected people". By providing access to the farmers whose livelihood will be affected by the COP7 decisions, the Government will be working in line with the principle contained in this policy.

The tobacco farming community is worried that since FCTC is a forum mostly of Heath and anti-tobacco NGOs, it lacks the knowledge of tobacco growing and does not know that in India millions of farmers and farm workers depend on tobacco for their livelihood. Lack of knowledge on this front is bound to negate the just rights of tobacco farmers, workers and adversely affect their livelihood and result in immense damage to the farming community and the Indian economy. It is important that the Tobacco Control Agenda of the WHO FCTC is not allowed to be hijacked by NGOs acting at the behest of vested interests.

We request the Government of India to ensure that the representatives of the tobacco farmers are able to attend the COP7 deliberations as part of the official Indian delegation. The Government of India should advise the WHO that in India tobacco plays an important socio-economic role and any decisions taken at the conference cannot be taken in isolation without involving important stakeholders like tobacco farmers.

Our participation will also ensure that the farmers view point on issues are taken into account resulting in reasonable and balanced policy adoption and prevent the formulation of extreme one-sided decisions by the Parties to the Conference which will cause misery and suffering to the livelihood of millions of farmers and others in the tobacco sector.

The Government of India has always been considerate to the voice of farmers and has paid full attention to their demands from time to time. Democratic rights of farmers to voice their concerns should not be denied by an international conference which is going to decide fate of the millions of tobacco farmers in India. The conference should abide by the democratic principles of this country and consider the views of hard-working people whose livelihood will be affected directly by decisions at this conference.

In conclusion, the FAIFA once again requests the Government of India, as the host country for the WHO FCTC COP7, to kindly ensure that the representatives of tobacco farmers are included in the official Indian delegation to the Conference.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,
For Federation of All India Farmer Associations

P S Murali Babu
General Secretary