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Press Release

Farmer Associations Question WHO's Unsubstantiated Recommendation on Substituting Tobacco with Alternative Crops

- *Climate Change and extreme taxation pushing tobacco farmers' livelihoods to the brink*
- *Farmer earnings have shrunk cumulatively by more than Rs.7,500 crores since 2013-14 due to crop substitution*
- *Over 100 million kg of tobacco production affected because of severe climate events*
- *Questions WHO unscientific recommendation to grow alternative crops on semi-arid lands, where even a draught resistant crop like tobacco is facing challenges due to climate change*
- *Appeals to the government to investigate unsubstantiated claims of WHO*
- *Demands WHO to deposit Rs.1000 crore to Tobacco Board to compensate farmers for losses due to crop substitution*

New Delhi, 31 May 2023: The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), a non-profit organization representing the cause of millions of farmers and farm workers of commercial crops across the States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat, etc. today challenged the WHO (World Health Organisation) to provide evidence on its recommendation that alternative crops should replace tobacco crops as they are negatively impacting sustainable agriculture and contributing to global food crisis. FAIFA also urged the PMO (Prime Minister's Office), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to start an investigation into WHO's unscientific recommendation. FAIFA has emphasized that certain groups with vested interests are propagating the (misplaced) benefits of other crops replacing tobacco cultivation.

The Climate Transparency Report of 2022 highlights the consequences of extreme events occurring between 2016 and 2021. Cyclones, flash floods, floods, and landslides have collectively caused extensive damage to crops, affecting over 36 million hectares of agricultural land. This damage has resulted in a significant loss of approximately \$3.75 billion for farmers across the country. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Bihar, and West Bengal have been particularly affected, reporting the highest crop damage due to flooding and heavy rainfall.

The impact of climate change is increasingly evident as traditional fertile lands experience a decline in yield and productivity, leading to frequent crop failures that adversely affect farmers. Tobacco cultivation is predominantly practiced in semi-arid regions where alternative sustainable crops are not economically viable. However, even these arid lands are becoming more inhospitable due to climate

change. In light of this situation, the unscientific recommendation by the WHO, a science-based organization, to replace tobacco with other crops is illogical and is an agenda driven by vested interests.

Previous attempts were made in Andhra Pradesh wherein tobacco farmers switched to alternative crops like grams and paddy. However, a study conducted by the Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) indicated that this substitution led to significant losses for the farmers in comparison to their previous earnings from tobacco cultivation.

High taxation by the Ministry of Finance has resulted in a surge of illegal and smuggled cigarettes into the country. These illegally imported or tax-evaded cigarettes offer attractive pricing as they avoid GST and other applicable taxes, providing higher trade margins to retailers. Illicit cigarette volumes in India witnessed a significant 44% increase over a decade, rising from 19.5 billion sticks in 2011 to 28.1 billion sticks in 2020, according to Euromonitor International. Consequently, FCV crop size has shrunk by about 40% from 316 million kgs in 2013-14 to 189 million kgs in 2021-22, resulting in a loss of 35 million man-days of employment and a 30% drop in income. Due to the steep drop in FCV crop size and crop substitution, farmer earnings have shrunk cumulatively by more than Rs.7,500 crores since 2013-14. Additionally, the FCV cultivation acreage in India plummeted from 2,21,385 hectares in 2013-14 to 1,22,257 hectares in 2020-21.

Apart from extreme tax policies, climate change is resulting in the decline of tobacco cultivation in India. The Tobacco Control Board, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, regulates tobacco cultivation and sets authorized production levels for each state. However, due to the impact of climate change manifested through cyclones like Nivar and Pethai, floods and droughts, actual production has consistently fallen short of the authorized levels. Between 2015-16 and 2020-21, the authorized production versus actual production in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka declined from 1572 million kg to 1468 million kg, representing a decrease of over 100 million kg. Furthermore, in Karnataka alone, continuous rainfall in 2022-23 resulted in a significant drop in tobacco production from the authorized 100 million kg to 59.98 million kg, indicating a 40% decrease.

Mr. Javare Gowda, President, Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), *“WHO officials should not be making such unscientific statements or recommendations. We invite them to our lands where tobacco is cultivated for a minimum stay of 30 days or as long as they want to experience firsthand the harsh conditions. We challenge them to replace tobacco crops and demonstrate alternative crops that are equally remunerative and sturdy. If they fail, they should shut down their offices in the country and leave. This is a fair demand since they are causing economic loss to farmers.”*

Mr. Murali Babu, General Secretary, Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), *“The recommendation of WHO is as good as asking our tobacco farmers to consume poison as replacement of tobacco with other crops will surely kill their livelihoods, destroy their lives and that of their families. Earlier experimentations have ended in huge losses for our tobacco farmers. We appeal to WHO to*

show their genuine intent to help the farming community and they should guarantee full compensation for any loss arising to the tobacco farmers. We request them to show their intent and deposit a minimum of Rs 1000 crore with the tobacco board and continue to replenish this every year so that amount can be distributed to farmers to cover the loss for crop substitution.”

“The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), an international treaty that India is a party to, is a threat to the livelihoods of tobacco farmers as it has not provided viable alternatives for tobacco-growing countries. Considering that the recommendations will result in revenue loss including foreign exchange earnings, the Government of India must investigate the recommendations,” **added Mr. Murali Babu.**

India should not implement the guidelines or recommendations made by WHO as these are “one-size fits all” solutions based on a western model of tobacco consumption. They do not necessarily serve the purpose of tobacco control or revenue enhancement in a country like India. Further, India being a large tobacco producer the livelihood of millions will be affected due to such appeals without doing a proper agro-climatic studies.

Yours Sincerely,

For Federation of All India Farmers' Associations [FAIFA]

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