

The 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) will take place this February.

The treaty, which came into force in 2003 and held its first COP in 2005, originally had the very legitimate aim of controlling tobacco consumption in order to counter its harmful effects on health.

Since then, its objectives have been radically modified. Throughout the treaty's long history, tobacco growers and their legitimate representatives at global level, the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA), of which I am President, have observed an increase in the radicalization of the methods applied by the FCTC, in which exclusion and lack of transparency have set the tone.

In 2012, during COP5 in Seoul, the Working Group for Articles 17 and 18, which monitors the search for economically viable alternatives and the environmental impact of tobacco production, presented a package of measures that were rejected by the majority of delegates due to their totally disproportionate context.



Since then, no public sessions have been held at any of the COPs, a procedure that is provided for in the rules of good governance of the international organizations. In short, we could say that the FCTC Secretariat works against its own rules of procedure. Furthermore, the FCTC has rejected and ignored the continuous requests that different associations and representatives of tobacco growers have made year after year to participate, to add value in terms of knowledge that only growers possess and to be able to find sustainable solutions that avoid chaos in a sector that supports millions of families around the world.

Growers and citizens who provide very important socio-economic support to their regions feel disrespected. What is even more worrying is that we receive this behaviour from a United Nations agency that is funded through our taxes. Therefore, we consider this to be an intolerable behaviour that is also contributing to the discrediting of an institution like the United Nations in which so many needy countries place their trust.

We believe that the different United Nations agencies with consistent work in agriculture and rural development will take part in this discussion and promote this dialogue that growers have been asking for almost twenty years. These agencies have the necessary knowledge to assess the situation and, in their fields of action, work with all the elements involved in the supply chain to find solutions. A format that is in no way comparable to that applied by the WHO FCTC, since, under the pretext of Article 5.3, it excludes all elements of the tobacco supply chain, leaving out the main players who are the subject of its arguments.

We cannot accept this behaviour, nor can we turn a blind eye to the failure to comply with the rules of democratic procedure that should prevail in international organizations. Article 5.3 lacks legality in the terms in which it is being applied. The COPs must hold public and transparent sessions in the form of sharing relevant documents and tobacco growers, as stated in the initial preamble to Articles 17 and 18, must be part of the discussions and legitimately represented.

A document was recently published by the WHO FCTC Working Group for Articles 17 and 18, which is intended to serve as a guiding tool to help governments establish fundamental guidelines in the search for economically viable alternatives to tobacco production. For ITGA's part, we applaud this work which shows, after more than a decade, consistency of argument, an analysis of the current situation with very valid data and a commitment to this issue which is so important for growers and their communities.

In this document, essential factors such as the inclusion of growers and some delegation of decision-making powers to rural communities are repeatedly mentioned. This is the perspective we share, where the knowledge and experience of the different growers' associations can play a key role. Growers' associations, for the most part, have a long legacy linked to rural regions, where some have been working for almost a century. To dismiss them as an inherent part of this process for the sustainability of these regions is a serious mistake. The governments of tobacco-growing countries hold the key that can open or close all the doors to the opportunities needed to transform our sector. Their most strategic allies in this transformation are the growers.

We encourage well-intentioned agencies and institutions to persist with pragmatic approaches and to give tobacco growers' associations the opportunity to participate.

We also need, for the sake of transparency throughout the process, to admit that the negative impacts of tobacco production are not exclusive to our product but extend to all areas of agriculture. With this we want to demand that the stigmatization that has been done so far by the FCTC gains the necessary balance in which the information shared publicly is reliable and scientifically proven.



On behalf of the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA), we call for common sense in order to build the bridges necessary for consensus and progress on the policies we all want to see implemented in the field of citizens' health, without the price to be paid being the sacrifice of the millions of growers who are currently unable to find a viable solution for their businesses.

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