

ITGA:

World Health Organization ploughs on with bureaucratic blunder and slams the door on 30 million farmers.

LISBON, 21 September 2010

The International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), representing more than 30 million tobacco farmers around the world, has launched a scathing attack against the World Health Organization (WHO), accusing it of being out of touch with reality and completely ignoring pleas by tobacco farmers in some of the most vulnerable parts of the world.

The ITGA's wrath is prompted by the WHO's decision to present final guidelines for adoption by the 171 member countries of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) at a meeting to take place in Uruguay in November 2010. The WHO has also recently rejected the ITGA's application to attend this meeting.

The guidelines for FCTC articles 9 and 10, would ban the use of ingredients other than tobacco in cigarette production. These ingredients are necessary in the manufacture of blended tobacco products, composed primarily of Burley and Oriental tobacco, which account for more than half the cigarettes smoked in the world, outside China. Without them, farmers of Burley and Oriental would see demand for their crops disappear. The recommendations for articles 17 and 18 are meant to provide viable crop alternatives to tobacco growing, but fail to present economically feasible options for tobacco farmers. The proposal risks decimating growers' livelihoods, condemning millions to a life of poverty and crippling the economies of many developing countries - the very same countries the WHO is funded to help.

"You have to wonder whether the authors of these guidelines understand what they are doing," says Antonio Abrunhosa, CEO of the ITGA. "One minute they tell you that with or without ingredients, all cigarettes are equally harmful; the next they go and ban one variety and not the other. How can that stop people from smoking? All it will do is send the economies of countries that rely on tobacco export crashing, along with millions of farmers and workers whose livelihoods depend on growing tobacco."

In a controversial move, the WHO has decided to exclude tobacco growers from the consultation process around these and other guidelines of the FCTC, claiming that they would interfere with their development. The move appears to contradict the FCTC progress report for articles 17 and 18 in which one of the guiding principles states "Tobacco growers and workers should be involved at every stage of policy development and implementation."

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“There can’t be many other examples in the world where a few bureaucrats can seal the fate of millions of farmers and workers, without having to listen to any of them or offer them any alternative livelihood,” says Abrunhosa. “Progress has been made in crop diversification but things can’t change overnight. These people should get on a plane and travel to Malawi to explain to 700,000 families that they’ve decided to make them grow potatoes instead of tobacco and see their reactions.”

The ITGA has launched a global petition with the aim of getting growers around the world to sign the document which calls on governments to reject the draft proposals on articles 9,10, 17 and 18. “The results of this petition will be publicized late October at our annual meeting in Kentucky,” says Roger Quarles, President of ITGA. “We aim to send out a very clear message to governments around the world that these guidelines are nothing more than a bureaucratic mess which will put the people who vote for them out on the streets.”

And there are encouraging signs beginning to surface for growers. In an unprecedented move last week, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), urged all its 19 member states to oppose articles 9 & 10, also calling on the WHO to put in place proper consultation mechanisms for all affected stakeholders to participate in any future development of FCTC guidelines.

ENDS.

About the WHO Proposals

The Framework Convention of Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.

Article 9 of the FCTC aims to regulate the contents of tobacco products, i.e., the testing and measuring of tobacco contents and emissions. Article 10 of the FCTC aims at regulating tobacco product disclosures, i.e. disclosure of contents and emissions of tobacco products. A working group, led by Canada, Norway and the European Union, developed detailed guidelines on Articles 9 and 10 for countries to follow when implementing national legislation. The latest version of the draft guidelines recommends a ban on use of ingredients in tobacco products.

Articles 17 and 18 of the FCTC address economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing. The latest recommendations will be discussed at the 4th Conference of the Parties and state that “Parties should, in cooperation with relevant national, regional and international organizations, not invest in the production and/or promotion of tobacco production [and] also gradually reduce the area under tobacco...”

Signatories to the FCTC will discuss and vote the guidelines on articles 9 and 10 and debate articles 17 and 18 at the 4th Conference of the Parties meeting in Uruguay in November 2010.

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About the ITGA

The ITGA is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 with the objective of presenting the cause of millions of tobacco farmers to the world. ITGA strives to provide a strong collective voice on an international and national scale in order to ensure the long-term security of tobacco leaf markets. Its members consist of tobacco growers from 26 countries, representing 85 percent of the world's tobacco production.

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