

August 23, 2000

From :  
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All India Committee  
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To :  
Dr. Gro Hariem Brudtland  
Director General  
World Health Organization ( WHO )

Attn : Dr. Derek Yach  
Executive Director  
WHO's Tobacco Control Programme  
The Tobacco Free Initiative ( TFI )

**Sub : Public Hearings on Global Tobacco Control Convention / Frame Work  
Convention On Tobacco Control ( FCTC )**

Dear Sir,

We, on behalf of United Trade Union Centre-Lenin Sarani and its affiliated Federation and unions functioning in Tobacco Industry, do hereby prefer this submission composed of the following facts, statements, observations, suggestions and appeal.

1. Our attention, has, of late, been drawn to WHO's Press Release No. 35. of May 18, 2000 calling for submission from interested parties including tobacco workers' organizations on proposed FCTC and inviting subsequently to testify and present their views at the Public Hearings to be held on October 12-13, 2000 in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. Our organization United Trade Union Centre-Lenin Sarani, India, welcome the initiative taken by WHO to call for submission from interested parties and arrange Public Hearings on the same. Our Organization is interested to submit its views on proposed FCTC and also appear before the Hearing and to testify subject to the conditions as contained in the last paragraph.
3. We are interested because our Organization represents more than a million

workers engaged in Tobacco Industry in India. It may be noted that United Trade Union Centre-Lenin Sarani ( in abbreviation UTUC-Lenin Sarani ) is one of the major Central Trade Union Organizations in our country recognized as such by Government of India. It has its representation in all the major Tripartite Committees constituted by Government of India on labour, industrial relation and welfare and safety of working population, including in Central Advisory Committee for Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund and also in the Expert Committee on Economics of Tobacco in India. We are also included in Workers' Group of Indian Delegation to ILCs of the ILO held every year in Geneva.

4. Now, a few words as regards our activities in Tobacco Workers and their conditions in brief. Our work is, in the main, concentrated among Beedi Workers in Tobacco Industry. Beedi is a kind of little cigarette, made of Kendu leaves (instead of paper) and tobacco. According to a conservative estimate more than 6 million persons are engaged in Beedi making, processing and allied works. Absolute majority of them are Home-based Workers; and the rest are Factory workers. They are very poorly paid and deprived of all other benefits to which other segments of workers are entitled. There are some areas in our country, like Jangipur Sub-division of the District of Murshidabad, where Beedi Industry has developed as an alternative to agriculture due to various reasons. In the event of stoppage of Beedi production, on this or that reason, these areas become affected by mass starvation and in such cases, starvation deaths and suicide are but an inevitable reality. In this connection it may also be noted that in general, female workforce constitute the majority and in many areas minorities belonging to various communities, including tribals, constitute a large percentage.

UTUC-L.S works among them though it's affiliated All Bengal Beedi Workers' Federation in the state of West Bengal and in other states through its affiliated unions. The UTUC-L.S., its affiliated Federation and Unions, on the one side, fight for their better wages (currently they work somewhere at near about a Dollar and somewhere at the rate much below than that per day) security of work and various benefits and on the other, educate them on various issues, social awareness and health hazards. We do also organize night schools and training camps for them.

5. Apart from 6 million Beedi workers which constitute our direct working area, there are other areas too in Tobacco sector where millions are engaged. According to 22<sup>nd</sup> report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on subordinate legislation, 20 million labourers and 6 million farmers are engaged in cultivation of Tobacco. In addition to the above, there are Cigar workers and persons engaged in the process of manufacturing various kinds non-smoking or chewing products which are widely used in our country. To add further, there are more than 3 hundred thousands of distributors/ sellers / contractors / shop keepers, whose livelihood are very much dependent on Tobacco industry. Thus it is seen that the question of survival of more than 40 million persons along with most conservatively estimated 120 million members of their family, is directly linked with the survival of Tobacco sector. Any organization of working people like ours can hardly ignore / overlook / undermine the legitimate interest of 160 million people and their right to work and live.

6. In this connection it is most relevant to draw your attention that as per unofficial estimate that the number of unemployed persons in our country is around 180 million. Half a million factories and establishments are closed rendering millions out of job. The policies of Liberalization, Globalization and Economic reforms, which are being pursued in our country since 1991 unabated and ruthless, have further, aggravated the process of eating up existing jobs and job-opportunities. Dismantling the organized sector is by now, an established rule in our country. Downsizing of the Government is going on with alarming speed. There is an official declaration from the Government as well as from the Planning Commission that the organized sector has no potential to absorb unemployed. Employment seekers are to depend on unorganized sector and on their own feet — they have advised.

7. In this sordid backdrop of alarming unemployment situation, we as a Trade Union, cannot welcome any such scheme which would further eat up existing jobs but does not contain in it an effective and convincing strategy of job-creation. In the present perspective our country can hardly accommodate even a loss of single employment.

8. From what have been stated above, we hope, it is more than clear why we consider ourselves, an irresistibly interested party to the question of processing the proposed FCTC — an International Convention.

But from this, it must not be concluded that our concern over loss of employment of millions the world over is only the reason that makes us an interested party to this issue. We are no less concerned over health care and protection and promotion of health of the entire world population. We observe with agony and pain, no country in the world — be it developed, developing or underdeveloped has been able to establish a comprehensive Public Health Care System which combines in itself preventive, curative and promotive measures and schemes. And there is hardly any country, which has been able to extend such system up to the grass-roots level. And particularly in these days, development and extension of such system appears to be an impossibility when, every Government, almost without exception, is withdrawing themselves from Social Sector activities, dismantling Public Health Care System existing so far with whatsoever limitations and asking its people to purchase 'medicare' and where economic growth is evidently de-linked from job, empowerment of people and their socio-economic upgradation. In this situation, the burning questions that very much haunts us are —

- i) Can alone ban on or control of tobacco use ensure protection of 4 million lives that are reportedly lost every year due to the use of tobacco?
- ii) Can it even help reduce other diseases?
- iii) Are we sure that the WHO would be able to resist deaths of reportedly 4 million per annum at the cost of livelihood and existence of 160 million persons permanently in India alone, not to speak of other millions of various countries of the world?

9. In our considered view, all these questions are to be seriously pandered over. On the question of health care, WHO needs to evolve a comprehensive and scientific approach which must contain it an effect strategy of building up Comprehensive Public

Health Care System, guarantee of employment of all, and socio-economic upgradation of entire population. Before framing up a new international legislation, it is pertinent to review the results of 'Health for All by 2000' movement initiated by WFTU in 1977 and also to consider how far 'Alma-Ata Declaration' has been implemented by its member and signatory countries.

10. The over-all situation, calls for extensive exchange of views on Health Care and FCTC related issues and consequences. But that is hardly possible by two days Public Hearings in Geneva. WHO team, specially constituted for this purpose, should visit every country, read peculiarities pertaining to each country, take into account of unevenness of development and hold extensive exchanges with all interested parties. And in case, WHO does not accept this proposal, it should urge the respective governments to arrange to send those who have submitted representations to WHO, at state expenses, as we apprehend that it may not be possible for the trade unions, particularly of the developing countries, to attend Geneva Public Hearing at their own expenses. Thus, in effect, the great majority of them would be deprived of placing their views and taking part in deliberations involving the legitimate and lawful interest of millions of people.

With these words, we conclude this submission.

Thanking you,

Sincerely Yours,  
Achintya Sinha  
Secretary,  
UTUC-Lenin Sarani and  
General Secretary, All Bengal BEEDI  
Workers' and Employees' Federation