Press Release

International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA) Demands Participation of the Farming Community in WHO FCTC COP7

- Tobacco growers from across the world appealed to the FCTC for Transparency, Democratic Process and Openness at the forthcoming 7th Conference of Parties (COP) of the WHO Framework Convention in India in November 2016.

- The growers at the ITGA Annual Meeting called upon the Indian Government, representing the world’s largest democracy and the host nation to the COP7, to ensure that the COP7 procedures and decision-making processes are not in breach of India’s high democratic ideals upholding participation and dialogue.

- The forum also adopted a declaration calling on national Governments to ensure protection of livelihood of millions of farmers and their families from the consequences of extreme and livelihood-threatening policies of the FCTC.

New Delhi, September 22nd 2016: The tobacco growers from across the world took the opportunity of the ITGA Annual Meeting to emphasize that Tobacco is a remunerative crop providing livelihood to millions of farmers, farm workers and their family members and contributing significantly to the economies of tobacco growing countries.

Tobacco growers representing growers’ organizations from India, Indonesia, South Africa, Portugal, Zimbabwe, Philippines, Brazil, Bulgária, Italy, Lebanon, Malawi, Tanzânia, USA and Zambia, met in New Delhi, India, on September 20 & 21, 2016 and expressed grave concern over the threat posed to their occupation and livelihood by the unreasonably harsh and arbitrary regulatory measures being adopted by national governments in many parts of the world.

Growers noted with anguish that such anti-farmer regulatory policies are being driven by anti-tobacco activists without any real world knowledge of tobacco cultivation and the importance of tobacco to the economy of many countries or the livelihood challenges faced by the farming community in the tobacco growing regions of the world.

Growers do recognize the need to regulate the consumption of tobacco products but demand balanced and evidence-based regulations that do not cause devastating impact on the livelihood of the millions of tobacco growers without achieving the desired objectives of tobacco control.

Mr François van der Merwe, President, ITGA, said, “We appeal to national Governments to prevent the NGOs and other anti-tobacco activists from spreading their propaganda based on suspect and misleading data directed at influencing the Policy Making processes. Measures impacting tobacco cultivation and tobacco farmers cannot be decided only by health officials and activists and requires the participation of tobacco growers and other stakeholders including related ministries.”

This is particularly important in the formation of the Country Delegations to the forthcoming Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) being held in India in November 2016. The Delegations from the FCTC signatory countries would be responsible for adopting FCTC proposals impacting tobacco
growers all over the world and thus the official country delegations should include tobacco farmers and their representative organizations.

Growers are highly apprehensive that the meeting will see COP7 participants agreeing to a host of extreme regulatory measures that impact tobacco cultivation and livelihood of tobacco growers in tobacco growing countries. Adoption of extreme measures at COP7 will directly and severely affect the livelihood of millions of tobacco farmers and farm workers around the world.

Growers noted with disappointment that since the beginning of the FCTC, their right to be consulted on the development of policies that would ultimately impact them has been summarily denied. FCTC processes have indeed become increasingly undemocratic and non-participatory with decisions made behind closed doors excluding tobacco growers, the public and even the media.

The growers at the ITGA Annual Meeting called upon the Indian Government, representing the world’s largest democracy and the host nation to the COP7, to ensure that the COP7 procedures and decision-making processes are not in breach of India’s high democratic ideals upholding openness and dialogue. Since farmers will definitely be impacted by the decisions at the COP7, no reason is good enough to deny access to the representatives of the tobacco growing communities.

Farmers who earn their livelihood from tobacco cultivation need to understand the future agenda on tobacco control and to share their viewpoint on the impact of the proposed policy recommendations under the FCTC. It is very important for the Governments of tobacco growing countries including India, who are Parties to the FCTC as well, to ensure that COP7 deliberations are carried out in a transparent manner and that tobacco farmers are made an integral part of the Country Delegations to the COP7. Moreover, experts and relevant bodies with the requisite technical knowledge on tobacco growing should be allowed to participate in FCTC discussions so that policy framework is evidence-based, unbiased and devoid of any vested interest.

The growers called upon the Governments of tobacco growing countries to take up the cause of millions of tobacco farmers and strongly oppose unreasonable and livelihood-threatening policy recommendations at the COP7.

Tobacco farmers at the ITGA Conference once again appealed that India as the host country for COP7 should seize the opportunity to leave a footprint on global tobacco policy by promoting stakeholder inclusion, democratic process and transparency at COP7. They stressed that India should also ensure that deliberations and policy recommendations at the Conference are reasonable and evidence-based and do not arbitrarily threaten the livelihood of millions of tobacco farmers and their families around the world.

**About ITGA:**

The International Tobacco Growers’ Association (ITGA) is the only organization representing tobacco growers’ globally. The ITGA is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 with the objective of presenting the cause of millions of tobacco farmers to Policy Makers and the world at large. ITGA advocates the socio-economic importance of tobacco in terms of employment, agricultural development and national economic benefits. Tobacco is an important crop in many countries of the world employing millions of farmers and farm workers.