

Dear Sir,

We, tobacco farmers from Macedonia, joining the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), the farmers' leaders in our country, the workers and those defending the free entrepreneurship, come to you to reclaim the right of more than thirty millions growers around the world. Their basic rights – the right to choose their crop- is continuously threatened by proposals to take away growers from the tobacco crop, without any guarantee of any viable alternative solution.

The tobacco crop provide subsistence for more than 35.000 families in our Macedonia. There is a huge misinformation fuelled by campaigns based on wrong data to despise our main source of revenue. The original mandate of the Working Group on articles 17&18 of the FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) clearly stated that Governments should provide 'technical and financial assistance to economically help the transition of tobacco growers and workers whose means of subsistence may be strongly affected by tobacco control programs'. There has been no indication of evolution in this sense until now; first because many reports, some of which, commissioned by the World Health Organizations itself, proved that nowadays, there are not economically viable alternative to tobacco, with similar market, income, and employment and, secondly, because the most affective by the decisions of that Working Group, the tobacco growers, have not been allowed to participate in the debates, sharing their vast experience in that search and their irrefutable results. Tobacco growers and their Representatives have, until now, been excluded from the discussions and decisions affecting their livelihood and this cannot go on.

Even being obvious, that in many cases, the proposals meant a threat to the employment and the means of subsistence of tobacco growers, WHO has refused to listen to these growers when elaborating those proposals. Those responsible for the elaboration of the guidelines, mostly from Ministries of health, has a very limited knowledge about the workings of the tobacco sector and do not understand that, in many places, there are not economically viable alternatives to tobacco growing. They also refuse to admit something obvious: artificial restrictions on tobacco cultivation will not solve the smoking problem.

We come to your Excellency, to help us to provide a realistic approach to these matters, taking into account the growers experience; to defend the growers' right the crops that better suit their farms, including tobacco; to reject proposals aiming at taking growers away from tobacco without providing viable alternatives, and lastly, to institutionalize and recognise in your country, the World Tobacco Growers Day, settled at every year's 28<sup>th</sup> of October.

With Kind Regards,