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Tobacco farmers in State, Karnataka stage protests

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BY OUR BUREAU





Tobacco farmers across Andhra and Karnataka, the two major producing States, organised rallies and meetings at 30 auction platforms in the two States on "World Tobacco Growers' Day" on Monday to protest against the Framework Control on Tobacco Convention (FCTC) recommendations, according to a press release issued by the farmers' organisation.

"FCTC recommendations are intended to throw the tobacco farmers into economic crisis. Farmers organised rallies and tried to raise awareness among all farmers on the FCTC recommendations," said P. Badri Reddy, a farmers' leader and a member the Tobacco Board here.

Farmers are protesting against the guidelines currently being framed by the working committee of FCTC of WHO to be discussed in COP5 (Conference of Parties) in Seoul (Korea) in November.

According to farmers, "the guidelines have taken a new and dangerous direction by suggesting that the government should phase out tobacco crop through extreme regulations before viable alternatives have even been identified."

Farmers are also protesting against FCTC recommendations towards regulating the seasons when tobacco can be grown, which they claim will create a *de facto* ban on growing tobacco during the peak seasons.

According to farmers, the original goals of FCTC mandated that: "Tobacco growers and workers should be involved in decision making and must therefore be given adequate channels to voice their needs and concerns."

"But to date tobacco farmers have been totally excluded from the debate.

The FCTC consultation process has allowed a few Health Ministry bureaucrats to seal the fate of crores of small tobacco farmers and farm labourers without considering the realities of tobacco farming. "It is strongly condemned," added Badri Reddy.

Tobacco farmers urge the Indian Government to incorporate inputs from tobacco farmers' organisations and agricultural policy specialists on specific, detailed and credible options for diversification with alternative crops during discussions on FCTC.

"FCTC recommendations are intended to throw the farmers into economic crisis," says leader of a farmers' body

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