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May 27, 2015

Honourable Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India
Government of India
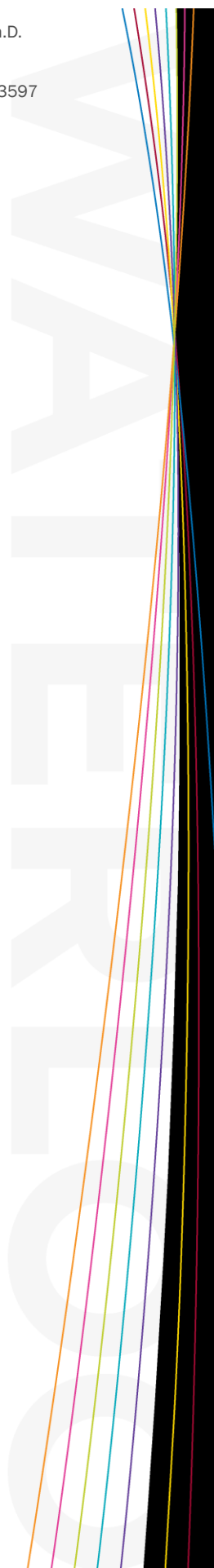New Delhi, India

Dear Prime Minister Modi:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Founder and Principal Investigator of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (The ITC Project) at the University of Waterloo. The ITC Project is conducting surveys of tobacco users and non-users in 22 countries, including India, to evaluate the impact of tobacco control policies implemented under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The purpose of this letter is to present the attached fact sheet *"Pictorial Health Warnings in India: Why Larger Warnings Should be Implemented Without Delay".* The fact sheet urges policymakers to implement new pictorial health warnings on 85% of the front and back of tobacco packages as stated in the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014 based on ITC Project research evidence demonstrating weaknesses in India's current health warnings.

As you may be aware, India is home to approximately 275 million tobacco users, including 23% of males and 3% of females. Tobacco use accounts for nearly half of all cancers among males and one-quarter of all cancers among females in India, and is also a major cause of cardiovascular and respiratory disease. The tobacco epidemic in India requires urgent attention. It is estimated that by 2020, tobacco consumption will account for more than 1.5 million deaths annually.

Tobacco companies use packaging as their major marketing tool to make tobacco appear appealing, while distracting consumers from the reality of how tobacco destroys health. Pictorial health warnings on tobacco packages are a low-cost method of warning tobacco users and non-users about the harms of tobacco. ITC Project research shows that large graphic images of tobacco-related health effects on both sides of the pack are effective in increasing awareness of the harms of tobacco and motivate smokers to quit.

India ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 5 February 2014. The Guidelines to Article 11 of the FCTC require that warnings appear on at least 50% of the front and back of the package. Evidence from the India Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (TCP) shows that most tobacco users are unaware of the extent of harm caused by tobacco. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has demonstrated leadership in introducing the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Product (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014, which increase the size of pictorial warnings to 85% of the front and back of tobacco packages. However, the delay in implementation is a set-back for public health.

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**International Tobacco Control
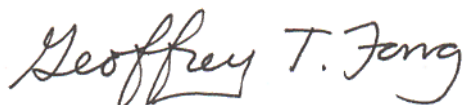Policy Evaluation Project**

The enclosed factsheet will be disseminated by the principal investigator of the TCP Project, Dr. Prakash Gupta, Director of the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health at a symposium and press conference which will be held on May 27, 2015 at the Tata Memorial Hospital involving MoHFW officials, civil society groups, active oncologists, and the media.

I urge the Indian government to act quickly in implementing the new Rules as quickly as possible. Strong implementation and enforcement of the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014, as written in the October 15, 2014 legislation is consistent with India's obligations to Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and would be a major step forward in the fight against tobacco.

I would be pleased to provide further evidence from the TCP India Survey, as well as data from our ITC Surveys in 21 other countries, to support your Government in implementing new pictorial warnings on 85% of the front and back of tobacco packages as quickly as possible. Please let me know how I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey T. Fong, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology, University of Waterloo
Senior Investigator, Ontario Institute for Cancer Research
Prevention Scientist, Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute
Principal Investigator, International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

cc. Dr. Prakash Gupta, Director, Healis – Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health

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