

MFC Statement protesting the cancellation of FCRA license to the Public Health Foundation of India - May 2017

We, the members of Medico Friend Circle* (MFC) express our deep concern over the sudden and apparently arbitrary revocation of the FCRA license of the Public Health Foundation of India by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

It is indeed surprising that an FCRA license that was granted in August 2016, after an undoubtedly thorough scrutiny by the MHA was revoked with retrospective effect within a few months on April 10th, 2017, by the same ministry. Such a procedure suggests that it is a severe punitive measure, and raises questions about the appropriateness of the procedures adopted by the MHA for scrutinising applications for FCRA.

We are shocked to learn from media reports that, among the stated reasons for the revocation of FCRA license of PHFI, its “lobbying the various stakeholders in its anti-tobacco campaigns” is one of the ‘serious’ charges against the organization. This is tantamount to the Ministry of Home Affairs working against the interests of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare alongside which the PHFI has ‘lobbied’. We are deeply concerned to note that the business interests affected by this government’s own anti-tobacco policy (announced in the National Health Policy 2017) may be influencing the MHA’s actions, which effectively destroy the health strategy of the MoHFW.

It is distressing that the FCRA regulations are being used by the MHA as a punitive mechanism without giving the organization being charged an adequate opportunity to respond with reasons and explanations. The lack of due process in the MHA FCRA cancellation methodology thus contravenes the principles of natural justice.

It may be recalled that in October 2016 MHA had suddenly cancelled the FCRA license of the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru and that as per newspaper reports at that time they were even labelled anti-national. Despite MFC’s own positions on various health issues that differ from the two organizations mentioned in this statement, we stress that these actions are deleterious to the health of the nation.

We would also like to point out that such an action will convey a negative image of the Indian Government’s commitment to health care across the world. It will also demoralize over 1000 health care professionals whose jobs will be in jeopardy because of this MHA action.

We urge the Ministry of Home Affairs to immediately reinstate the FCRA license of the PHFI, and that the organization be given adequate time to respond to the allegations, so that it can continue with its work of strengthening public health across the country.

We strongly call for a corrective and constructive approach to be taken with respect to such organizations in future, rather than a coercive or punitive one.

Medico Friend Circle

** Medico Friend Circle is a 43-year-old organization of doctors and social activists who have been working on issues related to public health. The organization has no political affiliations and has over 350 members who represent a wide spectrum of civil societal interest in the health of the people of India. Many people affiliated to MFC have worked among the poor in rural and urban areas.*
