

The Honourable Dr Harsh Vardhan
Cabinet Minister
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India
New Delhi 110 002

21 May 2020

Subject: Re closure of slaughterhouses.

Dear Dr Vardhan,

It gives us great pleasure to congratulate you on your appointment as the Chairman of the World Health Organization's Executive Board, we wish you the best upon assumption of your new responsibilities.

As the lockdown eases, I'm writing from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India to urge you to take steps to ensure licensed slaughterhouses are closed at least until a suitable daily COVID-19 testing programme is in place to protect workers, their families, and the entire community from the spread of this dangerous disease. I also respectfully request that you please encourage relevant officials and state governments to ensure unlicensed slaughterhouses are permanently closed.

Slaughterhouses around the world are hotbeds of COVID-19, since maintaining the recommended 2 metres of social distance among workers is nearly impossible inside them. In the US, 15,000 slaughterhouse and meat-processing plant employees have contracted COVID-19 and at least 60 of them have died. It was also recently reported that in Europe, more than 1,000 slaughterhouse workers have contracted COVID-19. The more the disease spreads through these facilities, the more workers will spread the disease to their families and communities.

To make matters worse, many slaughterhouses in India lack suitable basic facilities such as ample water, proper cleaning supplies, adequate drainage, and effective waste disposal. Staff perform physically demanding and emotionally stressful work – which can weaken immune systems – and they spend their days surrounded by blood, faeces, urine, and associated pathogens, often without wearing shoes or any protective gear, which puts them at risk of contracting zoonotic diseases (spread from other species) such as brucellosis, leptospirosis, and Q fever. Now, these workers also have to fear for their lives because of COVID-19 – which is believed to have first infected humans at a Chinese live-animal market.

Filthy slaughterhouses spread diseases, and we hope you agree nobody should be in one right now – not the workers who risk infecting themselves and others or the terrified chickens, buffaloes, or other

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- PETA Foundation (UK)
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animals whose throats are commonly slit while they are still fully aware of what is happening to them. Meat is not a necessity. For the sake of human health and on behalf of the animals destined to be slaughtered, PETA India urges you to promote vegan foods and help ensure slaughterhouse closures, at least until suitable COVID-19 testing for workers is in place.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals in the US. In a position paper, the group states the following:

It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics that appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes. ... Vegetarians and vegans are at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including ischemic heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer, and obesity. Low intake of saturated fat and high intakes of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, soy products, nuts, and seeds (all rich in fibre and phytochemicals) are characteristics of vegetarian and vegan diets that produce lower total and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels and better serum glucose control. These factors contribute to reduction of chronic disease.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this important matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kiran Ahuja (B.P.Th, DNHE)
Vegan Outreach Coordinator
PETA India

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