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Honourable Chief Minister
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Namakkal Kavignar Maaligai
Fort St George
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Thiru Ma Subramaniun
Honourable Minister
Health, Medical Education, and Family Welfare Department
Government of Tamil Nadu
Namakkal Kavignar Maaligai
Fort St George
Chennai 600 009

22 December 2021

Subject: Regarding Tamil Nadu jallikattu events amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Ministers:

We, the undersigned health-care professionals, are writing to urge the Tamil Nadu government to refuse to grant permission for jallikattu events in the state in 2022. Allowing mass gatherings of hundreds or thousands of people at jallikattu events during a pandemic – especially given the new threat presented by Omicron (B.1.1.529) and the ongoing concern over Delta variants (B.1.617.2 and AY.4.2) – poses a considerable risk to public health and could increase demands on India's health-care system. This is especially so considering that over 100 million Indians reportedly missed the second dose of their vaccine. What's more, a recent UK study showed that immunity against COVID-19 is waning quickly – even among those administered with both doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine (Covishield).

The World Health Organization has designated the variant B.1.1.529 a new variant of concern based on the input of the Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution, which studies the evolution of COVID-19. The new variant has a large number of mutations, and evidence so far shows that it spreads at a rate faster than other variants and is more resistant to vaccines.

In response, All India Institute of Medical Sciences Director Professor Randeep Guleria has advised the public to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour strictly and not let our guard down. The Indian Medical Association has also urged the public to follow social distancing practices, wear masks, and avoid mass social gatherings.

In addition, the central government continues to recognise COVID-19 as a serious risk, postponing the full resumption of international flights until 31 January 2022.

As of 15 December 2021, there have been 34,703,644 COVID-19 cases and 475,888 deaths from the disease in India. In Tamil Nadu, as of that date, there were 7,611 active cases and had been a total of 36,633 deaths. To allow jallikattu to take place would be contrary to every public health precaution aimed at preventing more tragedy.

Recommendations by health-care professionals for the cancellation of the 2021 jallikattu events were ignored, and it can be reasonably assumed that an indeterminable number of people became ill with COVID-19 at these events. Photographs and video footage of crowds showed a complete lack of social distancing and mask-wearing. What's more, according to media reports, at least five people were killed and more than 200 people injured in the events this year.

In light of the highly contagious nature of the disease and the way participants and spectators inevitably come into close proximity at such mass gatherings, despite any precautions planned by the Tamil Nadu government and the ongoing vaccination efforts, the risk of infection remains high.

To add to the concerns, since the Tamil Nadu government legalised jallikattu in 2017, at least 22 bulls and 69 humans have reportedly died and more than 4,696 humans have been injured in events organised throughout the state.

If India and the world at large is to see an end to this pandemic, there is an urgent need to ensure that large gatherings are avoided. As a precedent for this, recently, police in the Haveri district of Karnataka disallowed a bull-taming event similar to jallikattu called Hori Bedarisuva Sparde because of concerns over COVID-19 and the welfare of the humans and animals who get hurt at these events.

As such, we urge the Tamil Nadu government to refuse to grant permission for jallikattu events in 2022.

Sincerely,



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