



Memo to Council

From the Office of Councillor Zoë Royer

Date: April 12, 2021

Subject: Support for Farmers in India

Purpose

Seek Council's support for the following motion.

Background

Last September, three agricultural bills which were enacted by the Indian Government. Farmers have been protesting against them ever since, and claim the government did not hold sufficient consultation before signing the three bills into legislation. They are:

1. the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill. This means farmers will deal directly with corporations and private buyers and will no longer be protected by the Indian Government's Minimum Support Pricing (MSP), a fixed price that insures farmers against any substantial falls in farm prices.
2. the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill. This requires farmers, corporations and private buyers to negotiate contracts individually, rather than the previously regulated price set by the Indian government.
3. the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill. This removes commodities like "cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes" from the current list of essential commodities.

Farmers are concerned these new laws will drive down prices and remove safeguards to protect them against corporate takeovers.

In January, India's Supreme Court issued an order suspending the bills and appointing a committee to oversee negotiations. But the government's harsh treatment of the protestors and actions restricting access to the internet continues. This has prompted criticism from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The majority of farmers own or lease less than one hectare of land and live precariously from one harvest to the next. In fact, India's agricultural sector employs 60% of India's population of 1.27 billion and accounts for 23% of its GDP. However, the annual income of a farming household in 2017 was 36,938 rupees – or approximately \$642 CAD.

Given there are more than 1.3 million Indians currently residing in Canada, strong ties exist between India and Canada. Protests have been held in communities across Canada. To date, the Canadian government has indicated its support of the farmers and many provincial governments including the province of BC, and several Lower Mainland municipalities. Over the last four months, this issue has received international media attention and has been reported on extensively by many reputable news agencies nationally and internationally.

Food security is a matter of international importance and for this reason, I am asking that Port Moody Council support the aforementioned motion to stand in solidarity with the Indian farmers and all other levels of government in Canada that are currently speaking out in support of the farmers.

Recommendation

WHEREAS food security is a matter of global importance;

AND WHEREAS the Indian government has legislated changes affecting not only Indian farmers but any country trading in agricultural commodities with India;

AND WHEREAS these changes allow for large corporate control of the Indian agriculture industry, an industry in the second most populated country in the world that employs nearly 60 percent of the Indian population;

AND WHEREAS the protesting farmers who are already some of the lowest paid workers in the world who have long struggled with poverty and debt, fear the new laws will severely and negatively impact their livelihood, leave them at the mercy of corporations by taking away the safety net of guaranteed prices for certain crops, and at greater risk of losing their lands to corporate control or otherwise;

AND WHEREAS the suicide rate amongst Indian farmers shows the fragility of the agriculture industry which is battling the effects of climate change and massive crop failures;

AND WHEREAS Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call upon the Indian government to immediately stop its crackdown on protestors amid ongoing nation-wide demonstrations against this legislation;

AND WHEREAS lending our voice to support India's farmers highlights the fact that local farmers around the world are indispensable to the social and economic fabric of all countries;

AND WHEREAS the cities of Vancouver, New Westminster, Surrey and Delta, along with the BC government, Canada's major federal political parties, and others across the country are speaking out against these legislative changes and/or the crackdown on protestors:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Port Moody stand in solidarity with the Indian farmers, and supports the rights of Indian farmers to speak out against these laws and any repressive measures against Indian citizens and their rights to expression and liberty;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City of Port Moody ask the federal government to continue to speak out against these regressive laws, and to accelerate the message of concern to the Indian government up to and including imposing economic sanctions against India.