



Prime Minister Rutte
Postbus 20001
2500 EA Den Haag

Prime Minister Rutte: be an advocate in India for freedom of organization and speech

From June 4 till 6 Prime Minister Rutte, Minister Dijkma, Minister Ploumen and 80 companies will visit India. Dutch representatives of development, environment and human rights NGOs will not be part of the delegation. The Indian embassy has communicated that they will not be given a visum.

The visit will take place in a context in which the right to public participation and organization and the right to freedom of expression in India are increasingly under attack. Also for many foreign, including Dutch, NGOs it is made impossible to cooperate with Indian civil society organisations. Visa are often not granted, permits for financial support are not given and even bank accounts are blocked.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has blacklisted a range of NGOs, including ICCO and Greenpeace and has even frozen bank accounts of among others Greenpeace India. Accusations of illegitimate financial transactions – though unfounded - are used as a reason. This might force Greenpeace India with 340 employees, to close down her office very soon. Also the Ford Foundation, DANIDA and a range of Indian civil society organisations and human rights organisations are victims.

The New York Times wrote *“Mr. Modi has an ambitious agenda to lift millions of people out of poverty and play a bigger role on the world stage. He almost certainly cannot attract the investment he needs while imposing a repressive social order and devaluing India’s greatest asset, a robust democracy.”* [1] US Ambassador Richard Verma expects a ‘potential chilling effect’ if the government continues with her ‘crackdown’ on NGO’s.

India is the biggest democracy in the world, with a rich tradition of civil society, public debate and defending the interests of the disenfranchised and the environment. A country with huge economic potential as explained by the accompanying text of the trade mission of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency:

“Prime Minister Modi has made the improvement of the investment climate into the priority of his policies. His initiatives such as 'Make in India', 'Clean India' and '100 smart cities' are offering plenty of opportunities for Dutch companies, especially when they provide specific knowledge and technology that is suitable for the Indian market.”

In the ‘Human rights policy - Justice and respect for all’ the Dutch government endorses the importance of independent civil society organizations and the risk of restrictions imposed upon them by repressive legislation.

The undersigning organisations are calling upon you to not only promote the economic cooperation with India, but also draw your attention to the indispensable role of civil society in India. A healthy economic development cannot be separated from a lively civil society, with respect for the freedom of speech and human rights.

We ask you to point out to the Indian authorities that the restrictions that are imposed on Greenpeace and other NGOs are in conflict with the constitutional protection of the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association.



With kind regards,

Greenpeace Netherlands,
Sylvia Borren,
Director

India Working Group ICCO
Gerard Oonk,
Director

Marinus Verweij,
Chairman

FNV
Ton Heerts,
president

Mondiaal FNV
Leo Hartveld,
president

Amnesty International Netherlands
Eduard Nazarski,
Director

For more information:

<https://www.amnesty.org.in/show/entry/india-curbs-on-greenpeace-violate-right-to-freedom-of-expression>

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b66a7b2c-f3da-11e4-99de-00144feab7de.html#axzz3agzocIFg>

http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/news/greenpeace_india_speaks/

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ford-foundation-funds-need-government-oversight-says-india/article1-1340434.aspx>

<http://www.newsweek.com/modis-war-foreign-ngos-will-have-dire-consequences-332314>