

## **Parliamentary Questions on Trade Mission India & Freedom for critical NGOs**

**June 3, 2015**

**Questions from the members Michiel Servaes and Jan Vos (both Labour Party) to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the trade mission to India and the request of a number of NGOs to advocate for freedom of organisation and speech.**

1.

Is it correct that a number of civil society organisations (Greenpeace, the India Committee of the Netherlands, ICCO, FNV, Amnesty International) have written an open letter to the Prime Minister in which they call on him to advocate for freedom of organisation and freedom of speech during the upcoming trade mission to India (4 to 6 June)?

2.

Are you aware that the Indian Embassy indicated that no visa will be granted for a number of representatives of these organisations who were planning to travel with the delegation? What is your opinion on this decision?

3.

Are you aware that the Indian Ministry of Home affairs has placed a number of NGOs, including Hivos, ICCO and Greenpeace, on a blacklist and has frozen the bank accounts of among others Greenpeace India? Are you aware that also other international NGOs and a number of Indian civil society and human rights organisations were affected by the measures? What is your opinion on these measures?

4.

Do you share the concern about the deteriorating climate for (critical) social organizations in India? Do you recognize the image that the New York Times recently outlined about Modi's ambitious agenda in the fight against poverty and for India's role on the world stage, which contrasts however with "a repressive social order"? Do you share the opinion of the American ambassador Richard Verna who speaks in this context of "a potentially chilling effect of recent actions by the Indian government against charities and advocacy groups"?

5.

Are you prepared to heed the call of the Dutch NGOs not only to promote economic cooperation during the trade mission, but also to draw attention to the vital role of civil society organisations in India?

6.

Are you prepared to specifically point out to the Indian authorities that the restrictions imposed on the aforementioned NGOs are in conflict with both the constitutional protection as well as with the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly as laid down in international conventions?

7.

In what way is, during the preparation of the trade mission to India, taken into account the government policy to include organisations in the field of corporate social responsibility and human rights (parliamentary letter “CSR and economic missions”, July 2013)? To what extent are conversations with or participation of NGOs part of the trade mission itself?

8.

Are you prepared to indicate clearly in the report of the trade mission how and in which discussions on the above mentioned subjects attention has been paid? Can you also mention the reactions of the Indian interlocutors?

9.

Are you prepared to answer these questions prior to the trade mission?