Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

HON. MAXIMO B. RODRIGUEZ, JR.
2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City

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March 5, 2018

Director,
Epidemiology and Disease Control Division
Ministry of Health
16 College Road
College of Medicine Buidling
Singapore 169854

Subject: Public Consultation on Proposal to Introduce Standardized Packaging of Tobacco Products in Singapore

We, the undersigned members of the Philippine Congress, respectfully write to express our serious concerns regarding Singapore's proposal to introduce standardized packaging for tobacco products.

Allow us to explain why we hold such views. The Philippines is an agriculture country that relies mainly on its agriculture sector to drive economic growth. Millions of our Filipino farmers and growers rely on tobacco, which is considered a high value crop in the Philippines, as a source of their livelihood. It also generates livelihood for the downline supply chain industries for tobacco products produced in the Philippines both for domestic and export markets including those destined for Singapore.

As tobacco products continue to remain a legal product globally, we strongly believe that there should be no discrimination or barriers to trade that should be imposed on such products including those coming from the Philippines. We are also very concerned that the standardised packaging proposal of Singapore will only result to the production of counterfeit products from unknown sources and origin, which will increase the sale of illegal tobacco and ultimately affect Philippine tobacco products exported to Singapore. Once this happens, the livelihood of our Filipino tobacco farmers and growers stand to be affected too.

While we fully respect Singapore's sovereign right to implement tobacco control measures to attain its public health objectives, we believe that there are better alternatives to attain this without potentially violating international trade law and negatively impacting our ASEAN regional trade relationship.

We trust that Singapore, as ASEAN Chairman this year, can promote regional harmony and facilitate free trade of goods including those coming from the Philippines.

For our part, we will encourage our Department of Trade & Industry together with our Department of Agriculture and Department of Foreign Affairs to closely monitor the developments on this issue in Singapore and if necessary raise the appropriate interventions before the World Trade Organization and its related Committees in order to protect the interests of our Filipino farmers and growers.

Thank you very much.

Very Truly Yours,

MAXIMO B. RODRIGUEZ, JR.

CC:
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