

Press Release

Pakistan to have international high ranking with 85% Graphic Health Warning on Cigarette Pack

Islamabad- March 30, 2015. The worldwide tobacco control race is on. If Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif enforces his two years old decision of raising Graphic Health Warning size to 85% on cigarette packs Pakistan matches with India in South Asia, surpasses Srilanka and a little behind Nepal that has enforced 90% size and is a world leader.

These startling facts were revealed by tobacco control activists –TheNetwork for Consumer Protection and Coalition for Tobacco Control (CTC)- in a press conference organized on the eve of second anniversary of the PM’s decision to enforce 85% GHW on March 30, 2015. Then the PM’s decision was announced by Ms Saira Afzal Tarar, Minister of State for National Health Services Regulations and Coordination (NHSRC).

No wonder Pakistan is just a friction away to take a leap step from the international ranking of 106 to 3rd behind Nepal and Vanuatu.

Nadeem Iqbal, CEO of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection says that the PM will kill two birds with one stone and will not only be dubbed as a international public health leader but will also be seen as serious in lessening the diseases burden cause by tobacco and saving 300 deaths per day unnecessarily lost to tobacco.

“Pakistan has shown exemplary commitment to tobacco control in the last couple of years. We declared ban on shisha smoking and restricted tobacco products advertisements. Pakistan announced the new 85% GHW that would’ve put us among the top 4 countries in the world including Nepal, India, and Thailand all from the South Asia region. However, after two years, we are still waiting for the enforcement of this new enhanced warning on cigarette packs.” Khurram Hashmi, the National Coordinator of CTC-Pak said. “On the occasion marking the second anniversary of the implementation date, we hope that the government would remain faithful to its commitment towards public health of Pakistan and also, to its international obligation under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).”

The coalition partners, Farz Association of Rehabilitation and Development, Social Welfare Society and United Development Organisation from Rawalpindi, Chakwal and Kalarsaadaan respectively, while appreciating the government’s initiatives to adopt and enforce numerous tobacco control laws, also urged immediate implementation of this much delayed 85% (GHW) notification. “At present, according to the Cigarette Package Health Warnings International Status of Canadian Cancer Society Report, Pakistan ranks 106 out of 205 countries in the world. After implementing this enhanced GHW, the rank would elevate Pakistan to the 3rd position alongside India and Thailand.”

“Considering the burden of tobacco epidemic, the government would have saved 645,300 adults from tobacco illness based on Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2014 survey. Another representative of TheNetwork for consumer protection stated that “Larger pictorial warnings have globally proven to be highly effective in motivating its user to move towards cessation and preventing youth to start smoking. The prime purpose of proposing larger pictorial warning is to create awareness about the hazards and ill-effects of tobacco consumption.”

A public health expert Ms. Sana Azmat, Project Coordinator of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, in a statement while expressing her views said, “Every cigarette manufacturing company in Pakistan understands the power of their product designing and packaging and they use it strategically to not only increase its sale but to attract new smokers as it is one of the few legal tools they can still use for marketing purposes They also can advertise at the point of sale and via product display in shops. They try their level best to glamorize their product regardless of the fact tobacco kills. On the other hand, government can tap this opportunity to reach out to every smoker by

implementing enlarged pictorial health warning and protect its citizens specially youth who pays one of the most important roles in national building from this heinous product.”

According to WHO’s report on tobacco consumption in Pakistan, nearly 108,000 people lost their lives annually due to smoking only while 1200 youth and children suffered with tobacco related diseases daily. According to the Institute of Medicine, “restrictions on package labeling are critical to reducing tobacco use and ensuring that smokers are adequately informed about the risks of smoking. Indeed, prominent health warnings on packages are among the most cost-effective forms of public health education available.”

The tobacco control advocates and coalition partners urged the government to enforce the notification of 85% enhanced PHW on cigarette packs with immediate effect in order to protect the lives of millions of Pakistanis compromised by the consumption of tobacco products....Ends