

Islamabad: The Network, Pakistan's non-governmental forum for protection of consumers' rights, condemned the Tobacco related products' advertisement, saying: "repeated advertisement makes the apology of tobacco industry as meaningless".

As per media reports, despite "Unconditional Apology" made by Phillip Morris International (PMI) for advertising its brand in different media outlets to National Tobacco Control Cell, it is surprising that even after an apology made in sneaky manner, the said advertisement is repeatedly appearing in different media outlets like in the latest issue of Newsline and Newsweek magazines.

The advertisement makes apology meaningless as tobacco company had enough time to withdraw the said ad, which it didn't, stated Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator (EC) TheNetwork for Consumer Protection.

Being a tobacco control advocate group TheNetwork for Consumer Protection raised the issue and protested with the government functional tobacco control cell against promotional campaign by big tobacco giant. TheNetwork also register a complaint with Margalla Police station in the capital territory against PMI. But unfortunately, the police have been dragging its feet for unknown yet obvious reasons to proceed on the case. This despite the fact that the offence entails merely Rs. 5000 fine.

TheNetwork who has a history of monitoring tobacco industry tactics and implementation of tobacco control policies in country has taken it as a test case to assess and highlight the existing loopholes in tobacco control law 2002 and to analyse if the law is fully implemented and state of enforcement of law to facilitate a common person to lodge a complaint at police station against any violation and get it registered?

There have been reports of the registrations of FIR against PMI in different cities of Pakistan.

Nadeem Iqbal while emphasizing the need to prioritize tobacco control in national policies to overcome the growing burden of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Pakistan said, we have reached at a point where we need to see if the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-smokers Health Ordinance 2002 prohibits tobacco and tobacco products to be advertised is effective when put to judicial review or has lacunas in it that needs to be fixed.