

Press Release

Tobacco Control advocates criticize government for bringing down cigarette prices in the proposed budget

ISLAMABAD-May, 30, 2017. While criticising the government for lowering the cigarette prices to that of counterfeit brands in the proposed budget, the tobacco control advocates say that this will only increase the number of child smokers in the country.

On the eve of world no tobacco day, the civil society held a picket in front of the National Press Club demanding that the government should withdraw the proposal of the introduction of third tier in tobacco taxation allowing international tobacco industry to introduce cheaper cigarettes to be easily accessible to children.

In the proposed budget, the finance ministry has reduced FED on a pack of 20 cigarettes from Rs 32.98 to Rs. 16 by introducing third tier. There is almost no change in the FED on upper slab.

Nadeem Iqbal, CEO, TheNetwork for Consumer Protection says, that the government has taken us five years back. As in the proposed finance bill, Pakistan has revised its tobacco excise tax system in 2017-18, again moving from two-tiered to three tiered system. Previously it was modified in 2013 moving from three-tiered, mixed, ad valorem plus specific taxes, to a two tiered specific tax for cigarettes.

“Something is terribly wrong among three federal ministries- Finance, Commerce and Health. While first two are in support of tobacco industry for their own reasons, the health ministry, whose incharge minister is Prime Minister himself, has recommended raise in tobacco taxes. A recommendation that is totally ignored by the Finance Ministry and FBR,” lamented Nadeem.

In its recommendation sent to the Finance Ministry two weeks ago, the Minister of State for Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSRC), Saira Afzal had asked for an increase in the Federal Excise Duty on lower slab of all brands of cigarettes from the current Rs32.98 to Rs44 per pack of 20 cigarettes.

But this is not the only failure the NHSRC has, says Khurram Hashmi, National Coordinator, Coalition for Tobacco Control Pakistan (CTC-Pak). “The people of Pakistan are still waiting for the government to fulfil its two years old commitment to implement 85% enhanced Graphical Health Warning (GHW) on cigarette packs”.

“More than 555,000 children continue to use tobacco each day. Youth is considered as future of nation. It means our future is at stake,” Khurram added.

The civil society activists at the picket were critical of government’s retrogressive measure to endanger the lives of the people saying that these will damage Pakistan’s efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets especially SDGs goal 3a, “Strengthen the implementation of FCTC in all countries”. Pakistan is signatory to the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which calls in its article 6 for “Price and Tax Measures to Reduce the Demand for Tobacco” by raising FED to at least 75%.

For World No Tobacco Day – observed each year on May 31 - the World Health Organization (WHO) has called on countries around the world to prioritize tobacco control and combat the tobacco epidemic in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Tobacco use disproportionately harms some of the world's most vulnerable populations. More than 80 percent of the world's smokers live in low- and middle-income countries, where the harms of tobacco use are further exacerbated by a lack of access to health care. Tobacco use also creates economic burden, costing countries a staggering [\\$1 trillion dollars a year in health care costs and lost productivity](#).

Around the world, proven measures to reduce tobacco use have greatly reduced the health and economic costs associated with tobacco. These measures include increased tobacco taxes, large graphical warning labels on tobacco products, restrictions on tobacco advertising and bans on smoking in indoor public places. These measures are called for by the world's first public health treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which obligates its 180 parties to implement these proven policies to reduce tobacco use.

In 2015, the United Nations made tobacco control policies a key indicator in the Sustainable Development Goals. The goals ensure healthy lives for all and encourage countries to reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – including heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, and diabetes. Tobacco use is the only risk factor shared by all four main categories of NCDs, which account for nearly 70 percent of the world's deaths.

The tobacco industry's deep pockets, skilled lobbying and clever marketing campaigns remain the greatest obstacle to progress in addressing the devastating global toll of tobacco use. Yet around the world, countries are fighting back. From [Uruguay](#), to [Kenya](#), to the recent landmark ruling by the [World Trade Organization in favor of Australia's plain packaging law](#), courts and countries are recognizing the right to health is more important than tobacco industry profits.

This World No Tobacco Day, it's time to put a stop to the global tobacco epidemic. Countries must raise tobacco taxes and implement the proven measures mandated by the FCTC to help achieve their sustainable development goals and protect future generations. Without urgent action, tobacco use will claim one billion lives this century. _____ends