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Friday, September 25, 2009 - Shawwal-ul-Mukarram 05, 1430 AH

Govt urged to implement health warnings on cigarette packs

ISLAMABAD—A Civil Society Organisation Thursday expressed immense concern over the non implementation of the government directive to Tobacco Industry to publish pictorial warnings on cigarette packs.

The BoD meeting of The Network also called upon the Health Ministry to take notice of the non-implementation of its directive by Tobacco Industry for publication of pictorial health warnings.

"The Minister of Health's announcement on May 31, 2009, of implementation of Pictorial Warning on cigarette packs was a landmark decision in the tobacco control measures. However, the delay in its notification and implementation of amendment would constitute a severe setback to tobacco control efforts of the Ministry of Health," Azam Khan, Assistant Project Manager, Media and Communications, The Network, told the APP, after the meeting of its Board of Directors (BoD).

"We urge the government to stick to its commitment enshrined in Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to which Government of Pakistan is signatory.

There is a history of Tobacco Industry's tactics to de-

lay the implementation of Pictorial Warning in other countries as well. This has not worked in the past and the Ministry of Health should make sure that history is not repeated in Pakistan," he added.

Khan said The Network expresses its full support and cooperation to Ministry of Health to stand firmly by its decision to implement the pictorial warning.

"The Tobacco industry is playing delaying tactics to implement the government notification regarding pictorial Health Warnings on cigarette packs. Tobacco Industry, being a powerful and overriding sector, had earlier used its muscle power to hold off the process for incorporation of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs and outers," he added.

"The Network has taken stringent notice of this irresponsible behaviour of the Tobacco Industry. Tobacco companies are trying to get more time from Ministry of Health pretending time constraints and non availability of print machinery," he added.

He said the industry while criticizing the regulations says that given the complexities in certain areas of regulation, the expertise of the tobacco is especially important in order to

develop regulation that is technically viable, practically workable and enforceable, thus undermined the expertise of the department.

"Through their lobbying activities, the industry is pressurizing and demanding of government to provide the high resolution graphics to be printed. They are also pretending that they need at least a year to import the required printing machines which is a baseless debate," he added.

"It is also campaigned by the industry that the Health Ministry is unable to go for the complete enforcement of the advertising guidelines of the relevant law because of inadequate implementation mechanism adopted by them. As the law is silent on the enforcing and monitoring authority to implement this ordinance," he opined.

Khan said on the other hand, the industry has started meeting with the high officials to pressurize the Ministry of Health to reverse or delay the implementation of the pictorial warnings.

"By using their bullying tactics, the tobacco industry is once again playing tactics by arguing the Pictorial Health Warnings Rules," he added.—APP