

Shawwal 19, 1430, Friday, October 9, 2009

Pictorial warnings on cigarette packets Health Ministry still to enforce laws

FOZIA AZAM

ISLAMABAD - With just eighty-one days left in the given deadline to the tobacco industry, Ministry of Health is yet to notify legislation that restricts the industry to comply with printing the pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets by January 1, 2010.

While strongly reacting over the delay on part of the authorities concerned, the Coalition for Tobacco Control (CTC) here on Thursday, appealed to Prime Minister Gilani and Health Ministry to speedily implement pictorial health warnings on the cigarette packets.

Ministry of Health is delaying the deadline set for implementing pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets, as it was due to issue notification as soon as it reached a decision to push the industry to come up with pictorial health warnings on cigarettes packets, stated Dr Arif Azad Chief Executive Officer TheNetwork at a press briefing.

"TheNetwork for the Consumer Protection along with the CTC apprehends that the

tobacco industry is actively delaying implementation of pictorial health warnings," Dr Arif Azad further said. Although Federal Minister for Health Mir Aijaz Hussain Jackhrani made an historic announcement for introducing pictorial health warnings by January 1, 2010 yet still the decision was far from implementation, he said.

"The decision has put Pakistan on the list of leading countries which have introduced such a key and radical measure into domestic legislation in line with Pakistan's obligations under the Framework Conventions for Tobacco Control (FCTC) WHICH Pakistan signed in 2004" he noted.

He was of the view that in Pakistan where literacy rate was low, introduction of pictorial warnings on cigarettes packets would act as powerful tool in curbing tobacco use. "We are deeply concerned at the lack of progress towards implementing pictorial warnings four months after the announcement," he added.

"Despite the fact that legis-

lation has been done and vetted, still there is no visible sign as yet of being it notified, Dr Azad regretted.

Speaking on the occasion Khurram Hasmi said, "Although the industry claims that printing pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets was too expensive and it would take a long time as the required technology for doing so was not available in the country are completely false and baseless".

He said an understanding of both the risks and severity of smoking were two important factors in motivating smokers to quit smoking and picture-based warnings can be effective in conveying the consumers about the risks involved in smoking.

While sharing some horrifying facts, he said, in Pakistan around 78 billion cigarettes were consumed annually and out of those as many as 62 billion cigarettes were manufactured by two leading tobacco companies, while the remaining 16 billion cigarette sticks were smuggled or marketed by the counterfeit or non-duty paid manufacturers.