

No check on violation of anti-tobacco laws

ISLAMABAD (APP) - Many public departments and organizations working in the federal capital have no proper mechanism to enforce anti-tobacco laws and any check on violation during duty hours within their premises.

Thousands of people, who do not smoke, become victims of second hand smoke as smokers openly smoke cigarettes in government offices, which is a clear violation of concerned laws, causing harmful effects on health of non-smokers, citizens complained.

Cognizant of deleterious impact of tobacco, legislation was undertaken by the Ministry of Health and 'Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers Health Ordinance 2002' was promulgated.

Later, through an SRO the government disallowed designated areas in offices for smokers, which were earlier allowed in the ordinance and totally banned smoking in any public place or office to protect the

health of non-smokers.

Prior to issuance of the SRO, all public and private offices were allowed to allocate a separate place for smokers like smokers' corner within office premises with adequate arrangements.

The citizens demanded that after promulgation of the laws all public and work places have become smoke free therefore smokers should not be allowed to use tobacco in their offices or at public places.

"Why such laws are not being implemented in true spirit and violators are not being stopped to do so. It seems no one is serious to enforce such laws," Muhammad Aftab, a citizen of federal capital questioned.

He added complete implementation of the law and strict action against violators will help to protect health of non-smokers particularly in public offices.

It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan had signed and ratified multisectoral and

multidimensional Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on May 18, 2004 and November 3, 2004 respectively.

Under provisions of FCTC, the country is required to bring its laws and policies in line with the global convention. Dr. Arif Azad, Executive Director of The Network for Consumer Protection said that tobacco was the main cause of numerous hazards to human health, adding that all national and international obligations should be followed by the concerned authorities in this regard to check on use of tobacco particularly in offices.

He said smoking causes many diseases and ailments including heart attack, cancer of lungs, oral cavity, esophagus, larynx and diseases like chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

He said the organization is working to raise the level of awareness of policy makers on the issue for making effective

policies for tobacco control in the country.

According to health experts, the use of tobacco continues to be a major public health challenge in Pakistan where 100,000 annual deaths occur due to tobacco related diseases.

They added tobacco consumption in the country is increasing manifold as a result of aggressive marketing and promotion of tobacco products by the tobacco industry including multinationals.

When contacted an official of Tobacco Control Cell, Ministry of Health said that SRO withdrawal on designated areas for smokers will help cell to have strictly check on law violators with the help of public and concerned departments.

He said a strategic plan of action has been made by the cell with focus on awareness programme for health officials, professionals, teachers, decision makers, administrative staffs etc.