

Press Release

Appeal to Senate to not pass tobacco industry tainted legislation

Islamabad: February 20, 2017, While calling on the Senators from both opposition and treasury to not to pass the private member bill to amend the Prohibition of Smoking and protection of non-smokers Health ordinance 2002, today (Feb 20) tobacco control advocates appreciated PM Nawaz Sharif for his decision to oppose the bill. Nadeem Iqbal, CEO, TheNetwork for Consumer Protection said: "The main thrust of the amendment in the existing tobacco law was to ban tobacco advertisement inside shops that is enticing children to take up smoking." But it's intriguing to note, laments Nadeem, that the senate committee where the amendment was referred to in its report took pains to defend tobacco industry: "...ban on interior display will deprive the retailers dealing in tobacco products of their right to carry out a legitimate business. Moreover, the inclusion of "visibility of tobacco products at point of sales in advertising will hamper the consumer's right to freedom of choice." The ground reality is different. The astonishing results of the survey conducted in six mega cities by TheNetwork show the tobacco companies are targeting children as the survey revealed that 83 percent shops having Power walls/Cigarettes behind the cash counter, 52 % Shops having cigarettes inside Glass Counters, 50% Shops place Cigarettes with candies/snacks, 14% Shops giving "Limited time Offers" or "Free gifts on purchase of cigarettes and 89% shops do not Display " NO sale to MINORS signage". The Coalition for Tobacco Control Pakistan (CTC-Pak) has also expressed serious concerns over recently presented private member's bill on tobacco control in Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination by the Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed. Referring to the report comprising recommendations by the committee, Mr. Khurram Hashmi, National Coordinator, Coalition for Tobacco Control in Pakistan (CTC-Pak), expressed his disappointment. "The committee opposed the comprehensive ban on TAPS presented in the bill in the larger interest of public health. The way committee omitted new amendments to fully enforce TAPS (Tobacco Advertisement, Promotion and Sponsorship) Ban and laws to plug marketing techniques employed by tobacco industry to target young kids. CTC-Pak feels this bill has turned controversial considering it has lost the true essence. This is ironic and unfortunate that the representatives of the people who pledge to serve the people defended tobacco industry instead of ensuring good national health." The National Coordinator said. "We demand the members of committee to retain and pass the bill in its original context. We hope Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed will defend the bill as per his commitment to protect our youth from exposure to tobacco products. Dissecting the bill to accommodate the interests of tobacco industry will greatly jeopardize the decade long efforts being done by tobacco control advocates and actions taken by the Government of Pakistan in this regards." As a signatory to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which was binding on all member states with WHO, banning tobacco and related products was one of the major step every country had to take in addition to many other measures including increasing taxation, banning tobacco use in public places etc. Hence, implementing FCTC framework convention, protocols and covenants were legally binding on Pakistan. But, unfortunately, the recommendations proposed by the committee will undermine years of hard work of tobacco control advocates, health workers, community leaders, mobilizers, lab staff, religious and political leaders, and the millions of others who contributed in to create effective tobacco control laws and politics." The national efforts to reduce tobacco use is carried out by CTC-Pak who strongly condemns the tobacco industry's influence over the government and public institutions and demands immediate enforcement of larger graphic health warning on cigarette packs and vigorous monitoring of implementation of tobacco control laws.. Ends