

## Anti-tobacco enforcement law gains momentum

FDE to complain against cigarette selling points located near schools; bazaar associations to work against sale of tobacco products to under-age youth

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Assisted by the World Health Organisation, the Tobacco Control Cell of the Ministry of Health hosted a workshop here Thursday to elicit suggestions for improved enforcement of the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance 2002.

The workshop was titled 'Improvement of Enforcement of Tobacco Control Laws' and its objective was to create awareness among different segments of the society, particularly with regard to important sections of the 2002 Ordinance, and to invite ideas on how the law can effectively be enforced across the country.

The focus of the activities of the Tobacco Control Cell is now directed towards effective enforcement of existing tobacco control laws. A lot of work needs to be done with regard to effective implementation of prohibition of smoking in public places, ban of smoking in public transport vehicles, prohibition of sales of tobacco products to persons below 18 years of age, and regulation of tobacco advertising and promotional activities by tobacco companies, etc.

Speaking on the occasion, Yusuf Khan, Director General of the Tobacco Control Cell, said that before any law can be enforced successfully on-ground, there is always a need to create awareness about it in the relevant sections of society. This is not just because all concerned segments of society are able to

get an opportunity to fine-tune their activities according to the needs of the law but also because good understanding of the law by all members of society leads to better enforcement on-ground.

Enforcement, Yusuf Khan said, is not merely the domain of the law enforcement agencies, particularly in the case of the tobacco control laws. For instance, under the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance 2002, certain categories of persons have been declared 'authorised persons' or persons authorised to eject violators from the premises or file complaints in writing before first-class magistrates in case of reporting such violations of the law.

These authorized persons include, not just government servants like police officers, but also citizens like restaurant managers, school principals, bus and wagon drivers, conductors and railway guards, managers of entertainment centers, in addition to parliamentarians, nazims and councilors. Yusuf Khan said that the Tobacco Control Cell is creating awareness among authorised persons themselves about their duties under the tobacco control laws and the procedures involved in the process of reporting violations of the laws.

Representatives from various public and private sector educational institutions discussed the manner in which Section 9 of the 2002 Ordinance could be enforced with regard to schools, colleges and universities. According to Sec-

tion 9, it is illegal to sell, store or distribute tobacco products within 50 meters of educational institutions.

Representative of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) Professor Kazim Hussain said that often 'khokas' are selling cigarettes near schools, where students buy cigarettes on the way to and from school or during break times. He said, FDE will complain to CDA about such cigarette selling points. Representatives from private and government universities gave suggestions on how their respective institutions could be made completely 'smoke-free.'

The workshop was also attended by representatives of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and various Bazaar Associations of Islamabad. A lot of discussion was generated with regard to Section 8 of the Ordinance. According to this section of law, it is illegal to sell tobacco products to persons under the age of 18 years. This crime is punishable with fine and imprisonment. The representative of the Jinnah Super Market Association, Malik Rabnawaz, said that their bazaar association will host events to create awareness about the law that tobacco products cannot be sold to children below 18 years of age. Their association will do this in partnership with the association of 'khoka-walas' of Islamabad.

Syed Adil Anees of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce told the participants that they will shortly hold an event in the Chamber House in which

all relevant bazaar and traders associations would be invited and the Tobacco Control Cell would be asked to give a talk and distribute awareness materials to create awareness about various aspects of tobacco control laws, particularly with regard to sections that deal with prohibition of promotional activities by cigarette manufacturing companies, in addition to prohibition of sales to children under 18.

The representative of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce promised to extend all possible help for furthering the cause of tobacco control under the law. Participants of the workshop also appreciated the legal notice served by the Tobacco Control Cell to a leading cigarette manufacturing company for allegedly breaking the law by providing free gifts and cigarettes on low prices.

The gathering also discussed how the menace of 'sheesha' has been imported from abroad and is now taking root in our society and gaining social acceptability. Yusuf Khan responded by saying that the Ministry of Health has already written two rounds of letters warning letters to restaurant owners, saying selling tobacco products to persons under 18 years of age is a crime punishable with fine and imprisonment and that no one should serve 'sheesha' to children under 18. Many restaurant owners have responded positively by removing designated smoking areas from their restaurants in response to the request of the Tobacco Control Cell.