



Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance

Press Release

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Failed: Tobacco Industry Funded Research on Illicit Trade of Tobacco Products in Asia

Manila, 30 May 2015: The Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) has stamped “**Failed**” on a tobacco industry funded research on illicit trade of tobacco products in 14 Asian countries.

Last year, Philip Morris International funded a second research on illicit trade of tobacco products in Asia, called “Asia-14 Illicit Tobacco Indicator 2013” which was carried out jointly by a Washington based group, International Tax and Investment Center (ITIC) and a UK group, Oxford Economics (OE). It is no surprise that the findings of this research, like its predecessor (Asia-11 Illicit Tobacco Indicator 2012), are pro-tobacco industry.

In conjunction with World No Tobacco Day, SEATCA has released “*A Critique of the ITIC/OE Asia-14 Illicit Tobacco Indicator 2013*”, saying the research fails in four areas: methods and data issues, lack of sufficient detail to permit assessment and replication, selective presentation of results, and plain mistakes and errors.

According to the main reviewer of the research, Prof. Hana Ross, Principal Research Officer of the Economics of Tobacco Control Project at the University of Cape Town, “The Asia-14 report fails to provide scientifically sound and unbiased information to policy makers and other tobacco market stakeholders. The reason for this is simple. The figures and statistics it reports are products of either incorrect or unverified/unverifiable estimation methods applied to often questionable data from multiple sources that do not blend.”

According to Dr. Ross, the quality of the original data collection is questionable due to the lack of representativeness and possibly intended bias. Many secondary data come from sources with an obvious conflict of interest.

The findings are selectively presented, highlighting examples of increasing illicit consumption while neglecting to point out the declines or lack of change in some countries.

More seriously, the report is full of errors and mistakes, which is surprising given the “commercial” quality of the results. For example, the report does not make any distinction between smoking incidence and smoking prevalence, even though these are two very different concepts. It also confuses “sales” and “consumption”, two fundamental concepts on which the calculations are based.

While illicit tobacco trade is a problem that requires government attention, it is often blown out of proportion and out of context by the tobacco industry in order to discourage governments from increasing tobacco taxes and implementing other regulatory measures.

Dr. Ulysses Dorotheo, FCTC Program Director of SEATCA said, “Governments should reject partnerships and non-binding agreements with the tobacco industry to solve illicit trade. Instead, governments should secure the supply chain in accordance with measures contained in the FCTC Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which was adopted in 2012 by the 180 Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The Protocol also enables governments to collaborate with each other rather than be misled and lied-to by the tobacco industry that is complicit in illicit trade of tobacco.”

Failed: A Critique of the ITIC/OE Asia-14 Illicit Tobacco Indicator 2013 (full text), see: http://seatca.org/dmdocuments/Asia%2014%20Critique_Final_20May2015.pdf

For more information on World No Tobacco Day 2015 and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, see: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/no-tobacco-day/2015/en/>