



Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance

Press Release

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Tobacco Industry Meddles and Thwarts Tobacco Control in the ASEAN Region

Manila, 18 August 2015: Tobacco industry interference and meddling in public health remains a big problem in ASEAN countries. This is the main finding of the recent report, *Tobacco Industry Interference Index: 2015 ASEAN Report on Implementation of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Article 5.3*, released today by the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA). The report found that overall there is only marginal improvement in the implementation of FCTC Article 5.3 in the ASEAN region in 2013 compared to previous years (2010-2012).

Brunei Darussalam continues to deliver the best performance in ensuring its tobacco control policies are not compromised and are strictly implemented. Indonesia, on the other hand, remains at the bottom with the government allowing the tobacco industry to participate fully in the development of policies as well as accommodating its requests in delaying tobacco control measures.

Countries were ranked in the order of their implementation of protective measures, from best to poor, as follows: Brunei, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Thailand, a tobacco growing country, had the biggest improvement with the government not accepting any contributions from the tobacco industry and government officials not endorsing nor participating in so-called CSR activities sponsored by the tobacco industry. This is significant because although the government owns the Thai Tobacco Monopoly but they have managed to prevent the industry from meddling in their public health policies. There was a slight improvement in efforts undertaken by Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Philippines; however these are remain insufficient in the light of the grim facts of the tobacco epidemic confronting these countries.

Countries that face high levels of unnecessary interaction with the tobacco industry, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, are vulnerable to high levels of tobacco industry meddling in policy development. The Philippines however continues to show leadership in implementing a Civil Service Commission and Department of Health Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC), which provides a *Code of Conduct* for all government officials when interacting with the tobacco industry.

“Transparency is important when dealing with the tobacco industry. Many governments do not have a procedure for disclosing their interactions with the industry. This is an important first step to prevent and reduce tobacco industry interference,” said Dr. Mary Assunta, Senior Policy Advisor of SEATCA. “We are dealing with an industry that continues to sell a product that kills. It misleads the public and intimidates governments. Governments need to do better to protect themselves and the public’s health.”

The ASEAN region has about 125 million smokers and more than 500,000 tobacco-related deaths a year. The tobacco industry has targeted the ASEAN region, which has a large young population, to grow its profits.

Full report: *Tobacco Industry Interference Index: 2015 ASEAN Report on Implementation of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Article 5.3*:

http://seatca.org/dmdocuments/TII%20Index%202015_F_11Aug.pdf