



Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance

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10 Years of the FCTC in the ASEAN

2 March 2015/Bangkok: In the first decade since the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) came into force, ASEAN countries have come a long way in strengthening laws and regulations to advance tobacco control in the region.

Ms. Bungon Rithiphakdee, Executive Director of the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), says: "In the ASEAN, much remains to be done to secure and sustain the direction of the FCTC. It is no secret that Southeast Asia, with 620 million people, is seen as a major market to target - and to not lose - by the tobacco industry. Governments and civil society have worked hard (and together) to provide for a cleaner, healthier environment for the region's people. But as the world marks the first 10 years of the FCTC, it must be stressed that threats from the tobacco industry persist. Over the entire decade, we have seen how unceasingly the tobacco industry has worked to undermine, if not reverse, the gains of the global treaty on tobacco control."

The FCTC's mandate to institutionalize effective health warnings, comprehensive bans of tobacco advertising and promotions, and the implementation and expansion of smoke-free zones, continue to threaten a global industry built on the trade of lies and death. Our youth remain vulnerable. In the Philippines, tobacco companies continue to push loopholes in advertising bans to peddle cigarettes to the young, via colorful promotions and promotional materials in neighborhood convenience stores.

Indonesia, the largest country in the region in terms of area and population, continue to be the only non-Party to the Convention. For as long as Indonesia does not implement FCTC-compliant measures, no less than 250 million Indonesians remain threatened by the influence and interests of Big Tobacco.

Fortunately, we have much to celebrate: Thailand's pictorial health warnings (covering 85-percent of cigarette packs), the passage of more progressive sin taxes in the Philippines, the expansion of smoke-free environments to restaurants and bars, World Heritage sites, and public events (including all the SEA Games), and various degrees of point-of-sale bans in countries across the region - these all point not only to success, but to increased cooperation and coordination. The region's governments draw strength and best practices from each other.

As with any milestone, the marking of the FCTC's 10th year is a time to take stock of such successes as well as continuing challenges. The tobacco industry continues to try to influence public policy from Indonesia and the Philippines to Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

If there is anything we have learned over 10 years, it is that political will is ever crucial. Governments must demonstrate commitment and a holistic approach to FCTC implementation. Civil society is willing to help. It knows, in fact, that it cannot succeed without working with national and local officials. But resources to counter the tobacco industry's formidable marketing muscle are thin - and as much as those resources must be augmented, our real strength lies in coordination and sincere cooperation.

Ms. Rithiphakdee says: "As we celebrate the 10th-year anniversary of the WHO FCTC, we grip each other's hands tighter and continue to keep the faith in protecting and saving lives in the ASEAN. We cannot succeed any other way".

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