



January - March 2022

## SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE ASEAN REGION:

### Lao PDR: Stronger Tobacco Control Law Passed

22 March 2022: The Prime Minister of Lao PDR has signed amendments to strengthen the tobacco control law, which provides comprehensive measures for tobacco control in the country.

Amendments in the law also define tobacco products to include electronic smoking devices such as electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and others.

Designated smoking areas are only allowed outdoors and must be located at least 10 meters away from the main structures with open air ventilation.

The law also strengthens implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and ensures a tobacco control fund from excise tax of tobacco products.



Congratulations to our partners in Lao PDR, especially to Dr. Maniphahn Vongphosy, for providing technical assistance towards this policy.

Recently, the tax agreement involving Imperial Tobacco was also the subject of an [exposé](#) by BBC. The Lao government signed a 25-year ILA in 2001 through a joint-venture with Imperial Tobacco Group, forming the Lao Tobacco Ltd (LTL). Imperial Tobacco Group has majority stake (53%) in the joint venture. This joint venture controls 79% of the local cigarette market share.

### SEATCA recognizes Tobacco Control Champions in the Region

In February, SEATCA recognized the outstanding efforts of the following government agencies that implemented best practices in tobacco control in the past three years:

- Ministries of Health of Thailand and Singapore for successfully implementing standardized tobacco packaging.
- Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for banning tobacco-related CSR in all educational facilities.

- Cambodia's National Authority for Combatting Drugs for banning heated tobacco products to protect the youth
- The Philippines' Department of Health for its commitment to implement the Civil Service Commission and Department of Health's Joint Memorandum Circular to protect the government against tobacco industry interference
- Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and Smoke-Free Heritage Sites and Cities Alliance (SHA) for promoting 100% smoke-free tourism.

## WHAT IS THE TOBACCO/VAPING INDUSTRY UP TO IN THE REGION?

### 1. Pushing for weaker regulations in Malaysia and the Philippines

There is continued interference in ESD policies (Electronic Smoking Devices – ENDS and HTPs) leading to the possibility of weaker regulations and increased in proliferation of these products.

In the Philippines, the tobacco/ vaping industry had pushed for a vape bill that provides for weaker regulation of ESDs than the current laws. Existing Philippine laws which regulate ESDs already provide safeguards to protect public health, particularly youths. However, the recently approved vape bill, currently awaiting the President's signature or veto, will [reverse these policies](#) and make these products more widely available by lowering the minimum age of access from 21 years to 18 years, allowing sales to non-smokers, allowing online marketing and sales, allowing multiple flavors that are attractive to teens, and replacing the FDA with the [industry-friendly Department of Trade and Industry](#) as the regulatory agency for these harmful products.

In Malaysia, it was recently announced that the government will [end its ban on sale of vaping products](#). The government has announced the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking) of Electronic Devices Order 2022. This means that, effective August 3, 2022, vaping products can be legally purchased in Malaysia, provided that the manufacturers and importers comply with certification and standards regulations.

### 2. Pro-vaping groups continue to disseminate misleading information

The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (CAPHRA) and other pro-vaping groups continue to push for misleading arguments to support ESDs:

- The [lifting sales ban of vapes](#) will result in drop of Malaysia's smoking rate.
- Use of less harmful alternatives to traditional cigarettes will [save about 100,000 Filipinos who die every year from smoking-related diseases](#).
- E-cigarettes are [proven effective in making smokers quit](#).
- [Thousands of Filipino lives will be saved](#) if President Duterte signs the Vape Bill into law.

CAPHRA is a member of the International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organizations (INNCO), an international network promoting ENDS/HTPs which has received a [grant from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World](#), which in turn is funded by Philip Morris International.

### 3. Using celebrities and social media influencers to promote tobacco and ENDS/ HTPs

In Cambodia, tobacco products are advertised and promoted in popular bars and night clubs, despite the law that [prohibits most forms of TAPS](#) in the country.

A [study](#) by our partners in Indonesia looked into the growing promotion of e-cigarettes through Instagram. With social media readily accessible to young children and teenagers, the tobacco and vaping industry has really taken advantage of the lack of regulation in Indonesia to push these products on social media platforms. In 2018, the [prevalence of e-cigarette use](#) in adolescents aged 10-18 years has surged to 10.9% from 1.2% in 2016.

Though tobacco and e-cigarette companies claim they don't advertise to the youth, their products are advertised all over social media, with influencers promoting products in different countries in the ASEAN, such as Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

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