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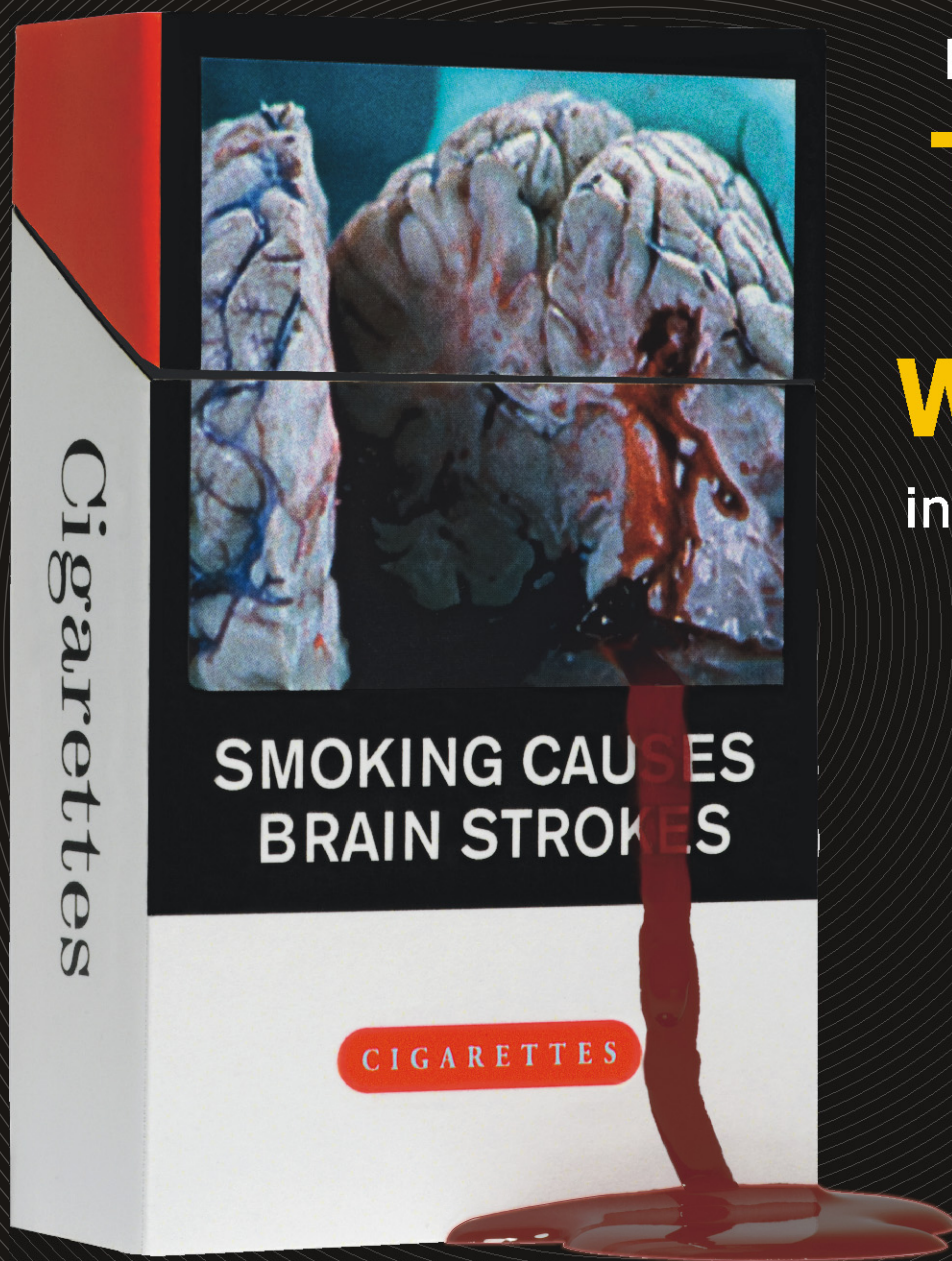
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Brief Profile on
**Tobacco
Health
Warnings**
in the South-East
Asia Region



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Foreword



I am pleased to note that a Brief Profile on Tobacco Health Warnings in the South-East Asia Region has been developed to coincide with the World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) 2009 on 31 May 2009—the theme of which is “Tobacco Health Warnings”—to highlight the importance of this issue for effective tobacco control. This profile also provides a brief overview of the situation with regard to tobacco health warnings in the Region.

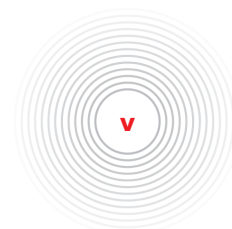
On analysing the information it appears that there is scope to scale up efforts to enact and implement legislative and other measures to introduce effective tobacco health warnings. Although only one Member State of the Region has so far enacted and implemented tobacco health warnings as provided for in the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, I also note the efforts being made by other Member States in this regard.

I also note with satisfaction that Member States in the Region are committed to tobacco control. This commitment should be translated into concrete action. One tangible action taken towards effective tobacco control would be to introduce tobacco health warnings. There is enough evidence to suggest that text and pictorial health warnings serve as effective tobacco control tools. The WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia remains committed to continue providing support to Member States to effectively implement the Framework Convention, in particular the relevant article on tobacco health warnings.

I hope that Member States would soon initiate necessary measures to implement the important theme of this year’s WNTD.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samlee Plianbangchang". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director



Executive summary

The widespread use of tobacco products in South-East Asia has resulted from unrestricted deployment of marketing tools by the tobacco industry, the addictive nature of nicotine and the lack of knowledge about the harmful effects of tobacco products among tobacco users, and among non-users who are also exposed to the harm in the form of second-hand tobacco smoke. The lack of regulation of these marketing tools and strategies used for a product that kills half its users has exposed large sections of the population to misinformation from the tobacco industry about the actual health impact of their products.

This year's World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) focuses on "Tobacco Health Warnings" and stresses the need to initiate action to implement Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) which mandates Member States to use appropriate health warnings on tobacco product packages. The Conference of Parties (COP) also adopted guidelines for implementation of the Article. The importance of health warnings has also been highlighted in the MPOWER Policy Package.

Comprehensive warnings about the dangers of tobacco play a vital role in changing its image, especially among adolescents and young adults. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey conducted across the Region revealed that boys and girls who smoke are under the impression that smoking makes them more attractive and wins them more friends than those who do not. The warnings should, therefore, be effective enough for people to associate tobacco with its extreme levels of addictiveness and dangerous health consequences and perceive it as socially undesirable.

Health warnings on tobacco packages that combine text and pictures are one of the most cost-effective ways to increase public awareness about the serious health risks of tobacco use and to reduce tobacco consumption.

In the South-East Asia Region, Member States have displayed a strong commitment for tobacco control. However, existing tobacco health warnings are yet to fully comply with Article 11 of the Framework Convention.

Of the 11 Member States in the Region, only Thailand has implemented text and pictorial health warnings on tobacco product packs as per the Convention. The Rules made by India to implement health warnings have been challenged in court. Several Member countries are also in the process of drafting legislations or regulations that would make provisions for health warnings in accordance with Article 11 of the Framework Convention.

WHO would continue supporting countries to develop and implement appropriate legislative measures in the area of tobacco health warnings.

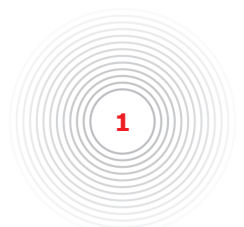


I

Introduction

Tobacco is a major health threat in the South-East Asia Region. Currently it is responsible for 1.2 million deaths in the Region out of the total global mortality of 5.4 million annually. Tobacco consumption levels in the Region are also high. It is consumed in a variety of forms—smoking, smokeless and indigenous. Current prevalence of smoking among males in the Region ranges from 30.6% to 58.6%; while among females smoking prevalence is less than 5% in most Member States except in Maldives (11.6%), Myanmar (13.6%) and Nepal (26.4%). The Region is also amongst the largest producers of tobacco and tobacco products. In order to tackle the tobacco epidemic the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) has been developed, adopted and is now being implemented by WHO Member States. The Region is committed to implement the provisions of this Framework Convention.

Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) mandates that countries should enact effective measures to ensure appropriate health warnings on tobacco product packages. It also says that these health warnings should rotate, be large and clear, and visible, include pictures or pictograms, and occupy at



least 50%, or no less than 30%, of the area of the principal display surfaces. The third session of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) held in Durban, South Africa, in November 2008 also adopted guidelines for implementation of Article 11 which provide detailed information for countries to effectively implement their obligations in relation to packaging and labelling of tobacco products. In addition, the MPOWER Policy Package promotes effective tobacco health warnings as an intervention. This intervention, labelled “Warn about the dangers of tobacco”, is one of six stated policies of the package.

The theme of The World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) 2009 is “Tobacco Health Warnings”. It calls on policy-makers to enact measures to ensure appropriate tobacco health warnings on all packs of tobacco products in accordance with related provisions of the Framework Convention and to implement the guidelines adopted by the CoP.

Tobacco health warnings are considered to be one of the strongest defenses against the epidemic of tobacco. Only few tobacco users fully grasp the health risks of tobacco use, despite conclusive evidence of the dangers it can cause.

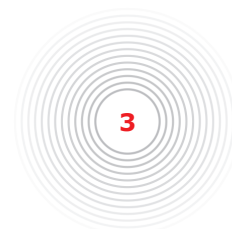
Comprehensive health warnings about the dangers of tobacco play a vital role in changing the image of the product, especially among adolescents and young adults. The findings of a study in Thailand revealed that pictorial warnings made users think about the health impacts of smoking and consider quitting the dangerous habit. Evidence also shows that pictorial warnings are more likely to be noticed than textual warnings, and are rated to have more impact on tobacco users. Pictorial warnings also communicate more effectively the health risks of tobacco use, are more thought-provoking, elicit a more intense emotional response and increase the motivation and intention to quit. They are particularly effective in communicating the nature of the health effects of tobacco to populations with low levels of literacy and to children and young people.

In addition, greater awareness about the health risks of tobacco use leads to more public acceptance of other tobacco control measures such as establishing smoke-free environments, banning the advertising and promotion of, and sponsorship of events by, tobacco products and other tobacco cessation initiatives.



**Box I: Article 11 of WHO Framework Convention
on Tobacco Control**

1. Each Party shall, within a period of three years after entry into force of this Convention for that Party, adopt and implement, in accordance with its national law, effective measures to ensure that:
 - (a) tobacco product packaging and labelling do not promote a tobacco product by any means that are false, misleading, deceptive or likely to create an erroneous impression about its characteristics, health effects, hazards or emissions, including any term, descriptor, trademark, figurative or any other sign that directly or indirectly creates the false impression that a particular tobacco product is less harmful than other tobacco products. These may include terms such as “low tar”, “light”, “ultra-light”, or “mild”; and
 - (b) each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labelling of such products also carry health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use, and may include other appropriate messages. These warnings and messages: (i) shall be approved by the competent national authority, (ii) shall be rotating, (iii) shall be large, clear, visible and legible, (iv) should be 50% or more of the principal display areas but shall be no less than 30% of the principal display areas, (v) may be in the form of or include pictures or pictograms.
2. Each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labelling of such products shall, in addition to the warnings specified in paragraph 1(b) of this Article, contain information on relevant constituents and emissions of tobacco products as defined by national authorities.
3. Each Party shall require that the warnings and other textual information specified in paragraphs 1(b) and paragraph 2 of this Article will appear on each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labelling of such products in its principal language or languages.
4. For the purposes of this Article, the term “outside packaging and labelling” in relation to tobacco products applies to any packaging and labelling used in the retail sale of the product.



II

Health Warnings in the South-East Asia Region: An overview

Despite political commitment of Member countries to controlling tobacco, existing tobacco health warnings are yet to comply with Article 11 of the Framework Convention and its implementation guidelines adopted by the CoP.

There is a high degree of prevalence of use of a vast array of smoking and smokeless tobacco products which are available in both formal and informal packaging. Those tobacco products that have formal packaging generally provide little or no information to warn consumers of the specific health risks. This reality is reflected in the lack of awareness or appreciation of the health risks of tobacco use among the public, especially the youth. This is an issue of concern, because specific and detailed knowledge and appreciation of the type, magnitude and consequences of risk can help motivate smokers more successfully into giving up the habit. Pictorial health warnings are particularly relevant in the Region as approximately one-third of the population is illiterate and the use of pictures or pictograms will convey the health warning message effectively to everyone.

Findings from the GYTS in the Region shows that nearly one third of the students aged 13-15 years in the Region do not know that exposure to second-hand smoke is harmful to them.

Figure 1: Percentage of students who are not aware that smoke from others is harmful to them, GYTS, selected Member countries of the South-East Asia Region 2006-2007



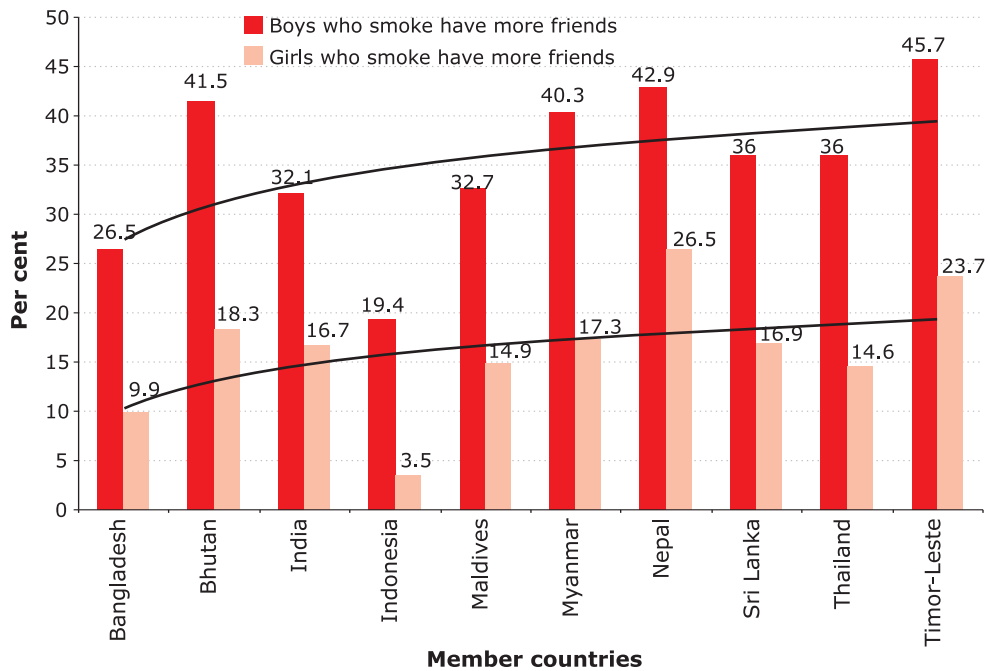
DPR Korea: Data not available

GYTS also reveals that nearly one third of the students believe that boys who smoke manage to win more friends and look more attractive. Nearly one sixth of the students surveyed are also of the opinion that girls who smoke have more friends and look attractive (see Fig. 2 & 3 on page 6).

Out of the 11 Member countries of the Region, only Thailand has implemented text and pictorial health warnings as per the Framework Convention. India has finalized the Rules related to health warnings in its Tobacco Control Act but these are yet to be implemented due to intense litigation. Three other countries of the Region—Bangladesh, Indonesia and Maldives—have mandated text-only specific health warnings. The remaining Member countries have mandated general health warnings. However, tobacco health warnings are only for cigarette products. Other indigenous smoking tobacco products and smokeless tobacco products generally do not carry any health warnings. In addition, only India, Myanmar and Thailand have banned deceitful terms such as “low tar”, “light”, “ultra light”, etc.

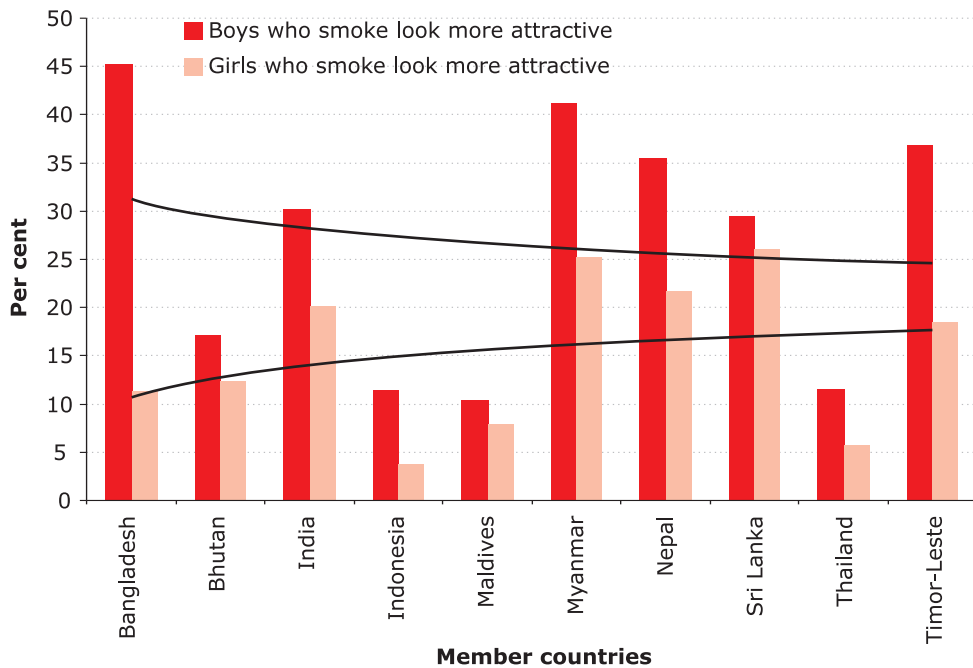
Several Member countries are in the process of drafting legislation or a set of regulations that will ensure health warnings in accordance with Article 11 of the Framework Convention and the guidelines for its implementation.

Figure 2: Perception regarding smoking among students, Global Youth Tobacco Survey in selected Member countries of the South-East Asia Region, 2006-2007



DPR Korea: Data not available

Figure 3: Perception regarding smoking among students in selected Member countries of the South-East Asia Region, GYTS 2006-2007



DPR Korea: Data not available



Box II: Countries with policies on specific health warnings in the SEA Region

Bangladesh: Six rotating textual warnings on 30% of the surface area of any smoking tobacco product (it is being implemented only in the case of cigarette packs).

India: Two rotating textual and pictorial health warnings on 40% of the surface area of smoking tobacco product packages and one textual and pictorial health warning for smokeless tobacco product packages (the same has been notified, and is due to be implemented from 31 May 2009).

Indonesia: One textual warning for all cigarette products (implemented).

Maldives: Five rotating textual health warnings on 30% of the surface area of the cigarette package (implemented).

Thailand: Nine types of rotating textual and colour pictorial warnings on 50% of the area of the cigarette package and two textual and black-and-white pictorial health warnings on 50% of the package surface of "Roll-Your-Own" (RYO) tobacco product (implemented).

Timor-Leste: Five rotating textual health warnings on tobacco products.

General health warnings

Warning labels are present on cigarette packages in all the countries of the Region and on *gutka* packages in India.



III

Health Warnings in Member States of the South-East Asia Region

Bangladesh

The “Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act, 2005” mandates specific health warnings on smoking forms of tobacco products and specifies six rotating textual health warnings, in the principal language of the country, covering 30% of the principal display area and appearing on each package and outside packaging of the cartons.

Box III: Rotating health messages in Bangladesh

1. Smoking causes death
2. Smoking causes stroke
3. Smoking causes heart disease
4. Smoking causes lung cancer
5. Smoking causes respiratory problems
6. Smoking is injurious to health

The provisions of the National Tobacco Control Act on health warnings have been well implemented on cigarette packages. However, the provisions have not been implemented on *bidi* packs in spite of the large-scale manufacturing and consumption of *bidi* in the country.

Both smoking and smokeless forms of tobacco products are widely used in Bangladesh. Hence, necessary amendments need to be made in the Act so as to cover all the smokeless forms of tobacco products. Pictorial health warnings also need to be mandated by the Act.



Advocacy meeting in Bangladesh on pictorial warning

Several NGOs in the country are currently advocating with policy-makers for an amendment of the law in line with the Framework Convention. The Bangladesh Consortium for Tobacco Control – an NGO – with support from WHO and the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids is demanding for an amendment of the law in line with the Framework Convention and has submitted to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and to other relevant ministries a draft pictorial warning for placement on tobacco product packs.



Textual warning on a cigarette pack currently sold in Bangladesh

Bhutan

In 2004, the Royal Government of Bhutan notified the ban on sale of tobacco products with effect from December 2004. Tobacco products are not produced in the country and cannot be imported for sale. However, all tobacco products brought into the country for personal consumption shall show the country of origin and should have appropriate health warnings.

DPR Korea

DPR Korea has measures in place to display specific health warnings on cigarette packs.

India

The Government of India enacted a comprehensive tobacco control legislation, "The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act,

2003”, which included provisions for specific health warnings to be placed on all kinds of tobacco products. However, there have been a number of litigational challenges that have prevented India’s implementation of the “Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules” which are inkeeping with Section 7 of the Tobacco Control Act, 2003. Following several amendments, the Rule notified in May 2009 mandates the use of two rotating text and pictorial health warnings for smoking tobacco products and one text and pictorial health warning for all smokeless tobacco products. The Rule also stipulates that the warning should cover at least 40% of the principal display area of the front panel of the tobacco product package.

Box IV: Challenges in implementation of health warnings in India

Following the enactment of the Tobacco Control Act in 2003, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules were first notified on July 2006. These Rules mandated that all tobacco products should carry a pictorial health warning from among four alternating pictorial health warnings covering 50% of the principal display area of the pack. The pictorial health warnings had four main components: a sign of the skull-and-crossed-bones in one corner, a health message at the top, a picture on the left and a textual health warning on the right-hand side.

A number of court cases were initiated against this notification, presumably with support from the tobacco industry. Consequently a Group of Ministers (GoM) was constituted and the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules, 2006 was amended. As a result of this amendment the skull-and-bones sign was eliminated and some pictures and text messages were modified. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) (Amendment) Rules were subsequently notified in 2007.

However, litigation continued in the courts and the GoM decided to further revisit the pictorial warnings. The Rule notified in 2008 mandated that at least 40% of the principal display area the front and back panel of the tobacco product pack should be covered by a specific health warning comprising a health message, a picture and a text message. One specific text and pictorial health warning was mandated for all smokeless tobacco products and one rotating text and picture health warning from among two options was mandated for all smoking tobacco products. The Rule was notified on March 2008 and was expected to come into effect by the end of 2008. But due to continued legal challenges the Rules were amended again. The new Rules dated 3 May 2009 have specified that the health warning should cover at least 40% of the principal display area of the front panel of the tobacco product pack. The implementation of the Rule is now scheduled from 31 May 2009.

In order to advocate for effective implementation of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules, 2008, a number of activities have been undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Health warnings on smoking forms of tobacco products as per 2009 Rule:

Pictorial health warnings for smokeless tobacco products as per 2009 Rule:



(MoH&FW) and NGOs. The MoH&FW published in all leading national and regional dailies a public notice on the revised packaging rules and clearly mentioned the implementation date. In addition, civil society has been running a sustained campaign for effective implementation of the Rules. The Health-Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth (HRIDAY) in collaboration with the Advocacy Forum for Tobacco Control (AFTC) has issued a number of advocacy materials addressed to Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assemblies.



Example of advocacy material developed by HRIDAY and AFTC

Indonesia

The tobacco control activities in Indonesia are based on the "Government Regulation No. 19, 2003 Regarding Making Cigarettes Less Harmful to Health". The Regulation proposes one specific health warning in textual form: "Smoking can cause cancer, heart attack, impotency, pregnancy disorders and fetal disorders". The message should be displayed "conspicuously on the label part of the packaging" in a clear and easy-to-read way, on one of the largest panels of the cigarette package, on a rectangular background, with the size not being less than 3 mm in height.

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Health formed a special task force to analyse the content of Government Regulation No. 19, 2003 and to make amendments through a ministerial decree mainly in the areas of second-hand smoke, ban of tobacco advertisement, promotion and sponsorship, and health warnings. The Tobacco Control Network is providing support to the Ministry of Health in this area.

As part of their support, the Tobacco Control Network drafted amendments to the Government Regulation No. 19, 2003 based on a study carried out by

the Faculty of Public Health, University of Indonesia, in 2007, with funding from the South-East Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA). The study revealed that about 76% of mixed respondents (smoker and non-smoker male and female) preferred textual and graphic health warnings to be put on the cigarette package and agreed that health warnings should cover 50% of the surface of the cigarette pack. In addition, the study revealed the four most popular pictorial health warnings among 16 pictorial health warnings provided by SEATCA.

The draft amendments were submitted to the Ministry of Health for their further perusal. The draft amendment has proposed health warnings to be introduced in all tobacco products in each individual packs and on the outside packaging of cartons.

Maldives

Tobacco control in Maldives is based on executive orders as the related legislation is yet to be approved by Parliament. The Ministry of Health issued a Circular in 2004 introducing health warning messages to all packed tobacco products sold in the Maldives with effect from July 2005. The Circular states that a textual health warning should appear covering at least 30% of the front and back of the package. It also states that the text message should appear in the local language and the messages are to rotate from among five selected options.

Box V: Rotating health messages in Maldives

1. Tobacco paves the way for Cancer
2. Tobacco blocks the arteries and leads to heart attack
3. Tobacco contains several chemicals harmful to health
4. Smokers are more prone to have abnormal babies
5. Those exposed to second-hand smoke are prone to dangerous health effects

Tobacco is not cultivated or produced in Maldives. All tobacco that is consumed is imported. The only tobacco product manufactured locally is the Maldivian *bidi*.

Myanmar

“The Control of Smoking and Consumption of Tobacco Product Law” was enacted in 2006. The law has a provision on packaging and labelling of tobacco products but the rules have not been formulated yet.

A policy advocacy workshop involving multisectoral stakeholders in tobacco control was organized in March 2009 to sensitize them on the need to establish provisions for tobacco health warnings in tobacco control legislation of the country.

Nepal

The Government of Nepal drafted a tobacco control legislation in 2007 in accordance with the Framework Convention. The draft legislation is awaiting approval in Parliament. According to the draft legislation, all tobacco products and their packaging would have a provision for health warnings.

Sri Lanka

The National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act [No. 27 of 2006] has provisions on health warnings but has not yet regulated these. The National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) drafted the rules and regulations on health warnings in February 2009 and sent them to the Legal Officer, Ministry of Health, for further use.

According to the draft rules proposed by NATA, each unit pack and package of tobacco products shall carry health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use.

Thailand

Thailand has taken remarkable strides in tobacco control, including swift implementation of pictorial health warnings. Thailand enacted two comprehensive tobacco control laws in 1992: the "Tobacco Products Control Act B.E.2535 (1992)" and the "Non-Smokers' Health Protection Act B.E. 2535 (1992)."

The experience of Thailand has shown how continuous tobacco control activities lead to adequate regulations in the area of tobacco health warnings. Thailand introduced tobacco health warnings in 1984 with the text "Tobacco may be injurious to health". The health warning has been constantly improved right up to the current Notification. The Notification of the Ministry of Public Health (No. 11) B.E.2549 (2006) states that all cigarette products sold in Thailand should display one out of nine selected rotating text and pictorial health warnings. It also states that the health warning should cover 50% of the principal display area of the cigarette packages. The notification also provides that only two black-and-white text and pictorial health warnings are to be used in "Roll-Your-Own" tobacco products. The Notification also mandates that the warning should appear on each package and outside packaging and be large, clear, visible and

legible. The Notification has been successfully implemented in cigarette packs but implementation on RYO products is yet to be strictly enforced.

Consequent to the adoption of the Tobacco Products Control Act in 1992, the Ministry of Public Health announced that health warnings on cigarette packages must cover at least 25% of the total surface (front and back) area. During 1997-2004 the Ministry of Public Health increased the area of the health warning to not less than 33.3% of the total area of the cigarette pack (front and back). There were 10 health warning messages used in rotation. In 2004, the Ministry of Public Health issued Notification Number 8, 2004 on compulsory printing of six pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs, and the Notification came into effect from 25 March, 2005. Thailand has thus become the fourth country to use health warning pictures on cigarette packages after Canada, Brazil and Singapore. Five additional ministerial notification were issued in Thailand in 2006 and 2007 to enforce stricter measures and provide clearer implementation instructions on tobacco health warnings.

Currently used pictorial health warnings



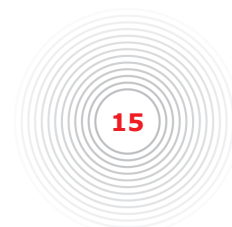
Box VI: Tobacco industry's interference to the implementation of Notification Number 8, 2004 on Rules, Procedures and Conditions of Cigarette Labelling and Label Content

In 2002, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) prepared to issue a Notification to include pictorial health warnings on each cigarette pack. Tobacco manufacturing giant Phillip Morris (PM) strongly opposed this and argued that this notification would a) unnecessarily increase the burden to the company as 33.3% of the area had already been allocated for health warning; b) obscure the valuable company's logo or brand and prevent effective communication with their consumers; c) limit the company's right to communicate with its customers by displaying its trademark or logo; and d) harm the value of its trademark which is protected by the Trademark Act BE 2534 (2001) and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, of which Thailand is also a signatory.

In addition, Phillip Morris pointed out that the MoPH's movement went against the spirit of Article 29 of the Constitution of Thailand as it limited the individual's rights and freedoms, and against Article 39 as it limited individual rights and the freedom to speak, write, print, advertise and express through other modes of communication. They also threatened that if the MoPH did not stop this movement, they would resort to legal proceedings.

However, the Office of the Secretary-General for Human Rights in Thailand interpreted that the MoPH's movement against tobacco did not violate the Constitution. It also stated that Phillip Morris quoted selectively from Constitution to project their own view and that pictorial health warnings would not obscure the logo, brand or trademark since there was enough space left on packs for the depiction of the company brand. Customers could still well differentiate between cigarette brands through their packs, it contended. Moreover, it was pointed out that Article 39 clearly states that the government could issue a law to limit individual rights or freedom to protect national security and to protect the health of citizens and consumers. In addition, Article 50 states that limitation of individual freedom is not possible except through the laws that are specially issued for the protection of national security, the economy, public utilities and consumers.

Thus, following a long struggle and the tireless efforts of anti-tobacco activists, the MoPH finally issued the Ministerial Notification (No. 8) mandating pictorial health warnings on every cigarette pack. The Notification came into effect from 25 March 2005.





Facsimile of cigarette packet, RYO packet and carton with health warnings

Source: Ministry of Public Health, Thailand

Evaluation studies have been carried out on how Thai youth and adults perceive tobacco health warnings on cigarette packs. Most respondents accepted that tobacco health warnings were effective in creating awareness about the harms of tobacco and expressed that the tobacco health warnings made them reluctant about taking to smoking, or if they had already started smoking, made them think of quitting. However, a systematic evaluation is required to measure the impact on practice and not only on perceptions.

Timor-Leste

Decree-Law No. 9, 2006, on Health Warning Labels and Tax Control of Manufactured Tobacco Products of Timor-Leste states that health warning labels shall be individually and visibly printed on both the front and the back

sides of every cigarette box and packet, right below or above the product trade mark, with letters in a colour contrasting with that of the background of the box or package and covering a surface equivalent to the size of the producer's trademark. Importers must print, in the Portuguese or local Tetum languages, at least one of the specific health warnings.

**Box VII: Specific health warnings
in Timor-Leste**

1. Smoking kills
2. Smoking is a health risk
3. Smoking causes cancer
4. Smoking while pregnant hurts the baby
5. Smoking causes sexual dysfunction



IV

Conclusion

The tobacco industry continues to divert attention from the deadly effects of its products through advertising and promotional campaigns, including the use of carefully crafted package designs. Tobacco manufacturers have always used packaging as a platform to reinforce brand loyalty and users' perceived self-image, particularly among young people. Health warnings on tobacco packages help reduce the effect of this marketing tool and increase smokers' awareness about the risks to them. Warning labels on tobacco packs are a cost-effective method of advertising about the dangers of tobacco use, providing direct health messages to tobacco users as well as to non-users who see the packs. Mandatory health warning label compels the tobacco industry to use its own marketing platform to spread the message that tobacco leads to disease and death, and it deprives the tobacco product packages of some of the glamour and glitz at their own cost. Moreover, this intervention can be implemented at virtually no cost to the government as a number of copyright-free images are available to be used in any country of the world and the cost of printing the health warnings would be borne by the manufacturing company.

The tobacco industry tries to undermine the initiatives for effective tobacco control, and this includes attempts to weaken government efforts at introducing pictorial health warnings. Member countries need to be vigilant about the

tobacco industry's tactics in this regard and are encouraged to develop and implement effective text and pictorial health warnings.

A comprehensive legislation in accordance with Article 11 of the Framework Convention and its guidelines for implementation as adopted by the CoP; deep political commitment, active involvement of policy-makers, relevant stakeholders, civil society and nongovernmental organizations; and the formation of a critical mass of adequately informed and motivated public is the need of the hour. Countries that are yet to implement pictorial health warnings are encouraged to initiate action in this regard. Countries which do not produce any tobacco product and rely on imported products or products purchased from beyond their borders, such as Bhutan, Maldives and Timor-Leste, should ensure that all tobacco products are stamped at the point of entry with the relevant textual and pictorial health warning messages in the local language. Legal measures on tobacco health warnings should be reviewed periodically and updated as new evidence emerges and as specific health warnings and messages wear out with time. The infrastructure necessary for compliance and enforcement activities should be put in place, along with regular monitoring and evaluation of the packaging and labelling measures to assess their impact as well as identify areas for improvement.

WHO would continue to provide technical support to all Member States in implementing Article 11 of the Framework Convention. It will also facilitate sharing of best practices about tobacco health warnings from other countries.

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This "Brief Profile on Tobacco Health Warnings in South-East Asia Region" emphasizes the need for health warnings to ensure tobacco control. It also depicts the situation with respect to tobacco health warnings in the Region. It gives an overview of the status of implementation of Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on packaging and labelling of tobacco products and highlights the main hurdles encountered by Member States in this area.



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