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LC Paper No. CB(2)584/16-17(67)

Panel on Health Services

Legislative Council

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China

Regional support for the Hong Kong Government's plan to strengthen Graphic Health Warnings for Tobacco Products (LC Paper No. CB(2)386/16-17(05))

Dear Sirs/Mesdames:

The Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) is a regional multi-sectoral, non-profit, non-governmental alliance that works closely with governments, researchers, and the World Health Organization (WHO) to advance tobacco control in accordance with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). SEATCA provides technical expertise to ASEAN Member States in developing and implementing effective, evidence-based tobacco control including FCTC Article 11 on packaging and labelling of tobacco products.

In 2016, the ASEAN region became the first and only geo-political region in the world to have all member states require GHWs for tobacco products. In 2016, Lao PDR and Myanmar jumped from small text-only warnings to 75%-sized GHWs, while Thailand, since 2014, has implemented GHWs covering 85% of both front and back of the pack, the world's third largest¹ after Nepal and Vanuatu's 90% warnings.

SEATCA fully supports the HK Government's proposal to strengthen and update its 2007 graphic health warnings (GHWs) on tobacco product packages by increasing the size to 85%, doubling the number of warnings from six to twelve, and including a quitline and quit information in the GHWs. This government proposal is in line with scientific evidence and international best practice, as well as recommendations in the FCTC Article 11 implementation guidelines, aimed at cost-effectively communicating the health risks of tobacco use, encouraging smokers to quit, and discouraging initiation among the youth. Larger GHWs also more effectively decrease the attractiveness and appeal of cigarettes and counter the alluring and persuasive images that tobacco companies use to promote their products.

Tobacco companies vehemently oppose large GHWs and in the past several years have filed various legal challenges against governments to block new and larger GHWs and advertising restrictions on tobacco packages, even abusing international trade and investment agreements to do so. The good news is that all these cases have been decided ***in favor of governments***, such as in Thailand and India (85% GHWs), Australia, UK, and France (plain packaging), Uruguay (80% GHWs and single pack presentation per brand), and the EU (plain packaging, larger GHWs, and ban on flavored cigarettes).

The HK Legislative Council should therefore stand firmly behind and approve the government's proposal without hesitation in order to protect its public health interests.

We agree that our submission be made available to the media and the public and be uploaded onto the Legislative Council website.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely yours,

Ms. Bungon Ritthiphakdee
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¹ In 2016, India also began implementing 85%-sized GHWs.