



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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PRESS RELEASE

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CAP calls for Plain Packaging Implementation

Since Malaysia implemented pictorial health warning (PHW) on cigarette packs since June 2009, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS), Malaysia, reported that 92.8 per cent of current smokers (93.2 per cent of men and 74.7 per cent of women) had noticed the health warnings on the packs. It shows that PHW is effective as also found in other countries that implemented it.

The PHW was implemented in line with Article 11 of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Malaysia is a party to the FCTC after it signed the treaty on 23 September 2003 and ratifying it on 16 September 2005. The FCTC serves as a guideline and catalyst for Malaysia to implement tobacco control measures.

Currently cigarette packs in Malaysia carry PHW occupying 50 per cent of the front panel of the pack and 60 per cent of the back panel. However, the tobacco industry is still able to use attractive designs and fonts to fill the remaining space found on the pack in an attempt to 'dilute' the effects of the PHW as well as using it for promotion.

Australia is the first country to take FCTC Article 11 a step further by implementing plain packaging effective from December 2012. By this, it means that cigarette manufacturers can only print the brand name and flavour in a mandated size, font and place on the pack besides the PHW and other legally mandated information, e.g. toxic constituents and tax-paid stamps. The appearance of all the packs is standardised and this includes the colour.

The result of Australia introducing the plain packaging was that between 2010 and 2013 smoking rate dropped to 12.8 per cent from 15.1 per cent for people aged 14 years and above. It shows that the plain packaging law enforced in December 2012 as well as the 25 per cent tax increase in 2010 helped to reduce smoking rate in Australia.

This month, May 2016, France, the United Kingdom, and Ireland introduced plain packs, coinciding with this year's theme for World No Tobacco Day: "Get ready for plain packaging". Meanwhile among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) countries, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore are working towards adopting the plain packaging. If they successfully did, then it will be an achievement in bringing FCTC Article 11 to a new level.

Tobacco companies have been using cigarette packs to glamorise their product and to seduce consumers into a dangerous and addictive habit. It has been estimated that one in two long-term smokers will die from smoking-related diseases and ironically smoking is the single largest preventable cause of disease and death. It must be emphasised that smoking harms almost every organ in the body, causes many diseases, and reduces health of smokers in general.

Smoking-related diseases kills about 10,000 (or 1 in 4) Malaysians annually. This is equivalent to having 250 buses, each carrying 40 passengers, crashing and killing all on board every year in Malaysia.

If a person smokes a RM17 pack daily, he would need to spend RM510 over 30 days. It would be 34% of his salary if he earns RM1,500. The 34% expenditure on smoking has a drastic impact on the family budget, depriving his family of what could have been spent on healthy food and other necessities.

Indulging in a wasteful habit of smoking a hazardous product also has more serious implications. It was estimated in 2005 that RM2.92 billion has been spent by the government to treat just three of the major smoking-related diseases. For his employers, there is man-hour loss affecting work productivity when he developed smoking-related diseases besides the company having to pay for medical treatment, and hospitalisation if necessary. His family will be saddled with medical bills and there is a loss of income when the person dies.

Moreover, his family members may also contract smoking-related diseases from inhaling secondhand smoke or from poisons from cigarette smoke deposited on walls of his home.

Hence, CAP says that the way forward in tobacco control in Malaysia is to implement plain packaging as a way to render tobacco product packaging unglamorous, particularly to women and youths. It is obvious that tobacco industry targets youth because they need to replace dead smokers.

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FACTSHEET
MALAYSIA: SMOKING STATISTICS

- Every year more than 5 million people died from smoking-related diseases globally.
- Expected to kill about 8 million people every year by 2030 of which 7 million of these deaths are in developing countries.
- One in four (25%) of Malaysians smoked tobacco of whom 43.9% are men and 1.0% are women.
- A daily smoker smokes an average of 14 cigarettes daily.

Current smokers (> 15 yrs)		4.75 mil (23.1%)
	Men	4.64mil (43.9%)
	Women	0.10 mil (1.0%)
Prevalence of smoking among youth(13-15years-old)Total		18.2%
	Boys	30.9%
	Girls	5.3%
Age group with the highest percentages of smokers		25-44 years
Av. no. of cigarettes Malaysian adults smoked per day		14 sticks
Cigarette per capita consumption		
	2000	864 sticks
	2010	491 sticks
% of youth purchased cigarettes in a store		53.4%
% of youth purchased cigarettes in a store and were not refused because of their age		53.2%
Amount Malaysia spent on treating only three of tobacco-related diseases in 2005		RM2.92 billion
Annual deaths attributed to major tobacco-related diseases (2006-2012)		11,056 premature deaths
Total no. of cigarette retailers		80,000 (not including street vendors)

Source: Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance, The Asean Tobacco Control Atlas, 2nd Edition, September 2014.