



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang
Consumers Association of Penang
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Press Statement

13 September 2022

CAP: Muslims should respect fatwa on smoking

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on Muslims in Malaysia to respect the Islamic ruling, or fatwa pronounced more than 20 years ago prohibiting smoking cigarettes, which is in line with Islamic teachings that encourage Muslims not to harm themselves and other people.

Issuing fatwas against smoking tobacco began on March 23 1995 when the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs of Malaysia discussed the issue relating to smoking from the view of Islam and decided that smoking is forbidden in Islam as it is harmful. This was followed in 2015 when the National Fatwa Council issued a fatwa which declared electronic cigarettes as Haram.

Even though there is a fatwa on smoking, many Muslims take it lightly. What is more worrying is that students are taking up the habit.

The Qur'ān, does not explicitly prohibit or denounce smoking, but gives behavioural guidance:

- “Don't throw yourself into danger by your own hands...” (Al Baqarah 2:195)
- “You may eat, drink, but not waste” (Al-A‘rāf 7:31)
- "Do not kill yourselves for God Almighty is most merciful to you" (An-Nisa 4:29)

There is no doubt that smoking kills as Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar revealed that Malaysia records 400 deaths a week due to smoking, such as cancer, stroke or heart disease. It is estimated that there are 7 million smokers in Malaysia who, besides having a higher risk of developing these fatal diseases, might suffer from symptoms such as breathing difficulties, wheezing or chest pains.

All forms of tobacco are harmful, and there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco. Cigarette smoking is the most common form of tobacco use worldwide. Other tobacco products include water pipe tobacco, various smokeless tobacco products, cigars, cigarillos, roll-your-own tobacco, pipe tobacco, bidis and kreteks.

E-cigarettes or electronic cigarettes are devices that look similar to traditional cigarettes. They generally consist of a one-piece unit that is used until it runs out and then thrown away. “E-cigarettes” “vape pens,” “Juul,” etc. all refer to the same class of products, with “e-cigarette” being the product itself and “vaping” referring to the use of the product.

According to statistics available, the number of Malaysians using electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) which includes e-cigarettes and vapes doubled to 1.2 million in 2019 from 600,000 in 2016.

The emergence of ENDS came from the tobacco industry’s search for ‘reduced-harm’ products because of increasing pressure on smoking arising from public health concerns. ENDS were only commercially available in Malaysia in 2015.

E-liquids used by ENDS often have nicotine, a highly toxic and addictive chemical, as an ingredient. The nicotine used in ENDS can be in the form of free-base nicotine, nicotine salt, or a mixture of them.

The Universiti Sains Malaysia-based National Poison Centre (PRN) reported that it had received nearly 30 cases of vaping-related poisoning between 2015 and 2020. There were six reported cases in 2019 and the number of cases doubled in 2020 to 13 cases. Most of the cases involved children aged between one and four years old, the youngest being 4 months. Ingestion of e-liquids can kill and the flavours are too enticing to children.

Therefore, it is shocking that vape dealers are opposing the Tobacco and Smoking Products Control Bill 2022 despite Islam's clear prohibition of smoking tobacco products.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) tobacco kills more than 8 million people each year. More than 7 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 1.2 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke.

WHO said tobacco users who died prematurely deprived their families of income, raised the cost of healthcare and hindered economic development. Many studies done on the impact of smoking show a link to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, including coronary heart disease, and lung cancer.

As smoking brings more harm than good CAP calls upon our religious authorities to:

- take steps to curb smoking, especially among Muslims.
- create awareness about smoking and the harm it brings
- remind Muslims about the fatwa against smoking. Preachers should give priority to the issue.

This issue needs to be highlighted internationally, especially among Islamic nations. Discussion on the matter should be brought to the attention of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, (OIC) which consists of nearly 60 Islamic countries, where a consensus on the prohibition of smoking needs to be made for the sake of Muslims worldwide.

Meanwhile, CAP calls upon all Malaysian ministries, agencies and departments to unite against smoking and not work against each other in counter-productive ways. As such we urge the Government to:

- continue the assertive enforcement of the smoking ban in public places, and to continue issuing fines as prescribed under the law. These fines are consistent with our philosophy of prescribing fines for various acts that harm the public and our health, such as speeding violations and not wearing helmets.
- unite all Ministries, Departments and Agencies against tobacco. We must achieve the World Health Organization's target of a smoking prevalence of 15% by 2025 and meet our commitments to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which we ratified in 2005.
- remove economics and politics from decisions surrounding tobacco, and to focus only on the health, public health, scientific, religious and justice elements.

Smoking kills, and we must stop it to achieve the Sihat Bersama 2030 vision. We want Malaysians to live long, healthy and prosperous lives. Therefore, we stand against the scourge of tobacco and urge the government to protect the Rakyat and lead the world in our smoking cessation efforts.

We urge our MPs to support the Tobacco and Smoking Products Control Bill 2022 in Parliament and not give in to the pressure from the tobacco and vape lobby.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
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Consumers Association of Penang