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Healis opposes global summit on tobacco

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A four-day event by Global Tobacco Networking Forum is being sponsored by Tobacco Board of India which is a clear violation of FCTC framework

Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health, an anti-tobacco advocacy group, vehemently opposed the upcoming four-day industrial Global Tobacco Networking Forum (GTNF) summit, which is scheduled to be held between October 4 and October 9 in Bangalore's ITC Royal Gardenia, stating that the event is in violation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to which India is a signatory nation.

Dr P C Gupta, Director of Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health pointed out that the FCTC policy that India had signed includes a restriction on tobacco advertising, trade, sponsorship and promotion. The FCTC has stringent restrictions to protect people from exposure to smoking and consumption of other tobacco products. He said by being one of the official sponsors of the event, Tobacco Board of India has clearly violated the FCTC framework and demanded that the board immediately withdraw its sponsorship and cancel the event forthwith.

The GTNF is annual event organized by a US-based publication Tobacco Reporter. The first summit was organized in Brazil and the next in Thailand. In Bangalore, more than 40 speakers from tobacco industry are likely to participate in the summit and discuss various issues related to the industry. Furthermore, the conference has also scheduled an optional field trip to Mysore to see – as the website <http://www.gtnf-2010.com/agenda.htm> states “From the jungle wilderness you will travel to a tobacco farm to see, first hand, the Mysore crop, best practices, field trials as well as get to interact with some of the growers there... courtesy ITC-ILTD and the Tobacco Board of India. You will get to visit one of ITC-ILTD's tobacco aggregating sites where you will see almost all tobacco varieties/grades grown in India, and even be able to evaluate them.”

Dr. Bhojani, a researcher with the IPH, who has extensively studied tobacco habits amongst students in Karnataka found out that smokers admitted they wanted a ban on sale of tobacco products altogether. The GTNF however, an event dedicated to peaking sales and distribution of tobacco products, will pose as a problem to such an appeal. Furthermore, the FCTC has stated that the reduction of tobacco consumption has to be done at the supply level but promotion and consent of the GTNF will only make that harder.

Sincerity of the government in its efforts to curtail tobacco consumption is under serious question, as on one hand it embraces FCTC policies and on the other it indirectly encourages tobacco consumption by being official partner to events such as Global Tobacco Networking Forum. “India is a party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The fact that the Tobacco Board of India is supporting this event shows that they are putting the Indian government in a compromising situation. With most speakers belonging to the tobacco industry, addressing topics such as ‘Total Display and Tobacco bans’ and ‘What it's like to be a smoker in 2010’, the event seems all set to evade and circumvent current bans and policies the world over.”

Dr P C Gupta Director of Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health stated that Indian government has introduced several legislations to curtail tobacco consumption. However, that government's sponsorship of such events not only jeopardize its own anti-tobacco efforts but also water down the Public Health forums' efforts to reduce tobacco consumption in the country. “We are struggling to control tobacco consumption in India and the summit planned in the month of October will be a challenge to us. The government of India is both legally and morally bound in curtailing the consumption of tobacco. We therefore urge the government to immediately take note of this violation of FCTC norms and cancel its sponsorship to Global Tobacco Networking Forum.”

