

Dear Editor

We are writing to express our concern regarding the misleading and inaccurate press release issued by the association of tobacco retailers and reported in several media outlets across Europe. The information is part and parcel of the usual propaganda commissioned by the tobacco industry to undermine the European Commission's efforts to prevent young people from picking up their first cigarette. The alarmist and emotive claims lack any shred of proof because they are simply incorrect:

- A simple reading of consultation report from the European Commission<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that that the 85,000 responses were largely the results of a *rent-a-mob* tactic from the tobacco industry and its allies to **delay and undermine the legislative process** that would introduce stronger tobacco regulation in Europe.
- There is **no evidence anywhere in the world that pictorial warnings or plain packaging would increase illicit trade in tobacco products**. On the contrary, smokers' use of illicit tobacco is related to price and availability.<sup>2</sup> There seems to be a deliberate omission from the tobaccoists in that **the only proven measures that do have an impact on illicit trade** are legislative measures to control the supply chain such as traceability features on tobacco products, as well as increased international cooperation.<sup>3</sup>
- Most tobacco distributors and retailers derive only a small portion of their revenues from tobacco sales.<sup>4</sup> As demonstrated in the World Bank report "Curbing the Epidemic: The Economics of Tobacco Control", **money not spent on tobacco will be used to buy other consumer products**.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore,

In light of the evidence and the decades of misleading and damaging public affairs from the tobacco industry – which has cost our society millions of lives and billions in healthcare costs – we are disappointed that they have learnt little. However, even more disappointing is that retailers, representing SMEs with strong community links, show no concern for the health of their young customers but continue to advocate on behalf of the only product which kills half of those who use it.

This action is a clear demonstration that the tobacco industry and its allies cannot be trusted to behave in a responsible manner, and gives greater weight to the increasing trend from governments to reduce its influence and impact.

Plain packing is feasible, legal and easily implementable. It does not cost any money to governments and works for public health. We trust that the European Commission and Member States are able to see this nonsense for what it is, and fulfil their duty as representatives of the public interest acting in the interests of the health of their citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Report on the consultation on the review of the Tobacco Products Directive*, [http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/docs/consultation\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/docs/consultation_report_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Moodie C, Hastings G, Joossens L. *Young adult smokers' perceptions of illicit tobacco and the possible impact of plain packaging on illicit tobacco purchasing behaviour*. Eur J Public health. Published Online First: 26 March 2011. doi:10.1093/eurpub/ckr038.

<sup>3</sup> Joossens L, Raw M. *From cigarette smuggling to illicit tobacco trade*. Tob Control 2012;21:230–4., <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/21/2/230.full#ref-32>

<sup>4</sup> Ping Zhang, *Understand and Evaluate the Impact of Tobacco Control Policies on Employment*. World Bank Economics Of Tobacco Toolkit, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPH/Resources/5Employment.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Jha P, Chaloupka F. *Curbing the Epidemic: Government and the Economics of Tobacco Control*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank; 1999 <http://go.worldbank.org/N4BBVYY9V0>.