



PRESS RELEASE

World No Tobacco Day – 31st of May 2020

The theme of this year's world no tobacco day is "Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing them from tobacco and nicotine use".

In Sri Lanka, tobacco use causes about 55 premature deaths per day and kills 20,000 people per year. The tobacco industry primarily targets children and youth to replace the gap created in their market due to deaths caused by their products.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that every year tobacco causes about 8 million premature deaths, globally. Out of this 900,000 people die due to second-hand smoke from being near a tobacco smoker. In the present day, tobacco has proven to be a more deadly threat to humankind than civil wars or any other causes. All types of tobacco products are specifically detrimental and unprofitable to developing countries and only result in draining of domestic resources for the profit of foreign multinational corporations in developed countries. Due to the grave social, economic, health and environmental harms caused by tobacco globally, the WHO brought into force the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 to prevent tobacco use. The WHO FCTC has been signed by 168 countries to date and Sri Lanka became a party of the FCTC in 2003.

This year's World No Tobacco Day places importance on tobacco industry manipulation of children and youth. The tobacco industry manipulates children and youth through marketing to implant a positive image about tobacco from childhood aiming to create consumers for their products. Every year the tobacco industry spends 23 million US dollars for this type of marketing. Furthermore, the tobacco industry spends 8 billion US dollars to influence young people's decisions to make it seem like tobacco smoking is a personal choice.

At present, multinational tobacco companies are using many manipulation strategies within Sri Lanka to trap our children and youth into using tobacco. These include,

1. Glamourizing tobacco products among children and youth through traditional media and social media.
2. Using social media influencers paid by the tobacco industry to manipulate youth on social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and etc).
3. Promoting tobacco use through various brand names and flavours.
4. Introducing new cheap cigarette products to the market and not increasing cigarette prices.
5. Displaying tobacco advertisements, tobacco product placement and using "not for below 21 years" ads in places frequented by children and youth to create a curiosity about tobacco products among them.
6. Promoting tobacco use via various festivals and events through social media.

According to the Global Youth Tobacco Survey – GYTS conducted by the WHO and national surveys, tobacco use is rapidly decreasing among youth. Another positive trend is that people who use tobacco are attempting to quit using. The increase in knowledge and understanding about tobacco industry manipulations have led to the rapid decrease of youth being trapped by this type of manipulation strategies and an observable rise in youth activism opposing tobacco industry strategies.

The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC) – Sri Lanka, suggests the following recommendations to develop these positive trends further and protect children and youth from the tobacco trap.

1. Ban single-stick sale of cigarettes.
2. Ban sale of tobacco products within 100 meters of an educational institution.
3. Implement a minimum unit price on cigarettes to prevent cheap cigarette sale.
4. Implement plain packaging for tobacco products.
5. Execute a comprehensive plan within the school system to create awareness among children about tobacco industry manipulation strategies.
6. Approve and enforce the amendments to the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) Act to prevent tobacco industry marketing through the internet and increase efficiency in enforcing the law against violation of the NATA Act.

We must take urgent action to safeguard our children and youth from tobacco harm by not permitting any further, the exploitation of our children and youth by multinational tobacco corporations for the sake of increasing their consumers and profits.

It is the duty of all Sri Lankans regardless of race, religion or political affiliation to expose agents who use manipulation strategies targeting youth.

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