



Media Release

World No Tobacco Day – 31.05.2025

“Unmasking the Appeal: Exposing Industry Tactics on Tobacco and Nicotine Products.”

At a time when the tobacco industry's subtle and aggressive marketing tactics are increasingly targeting youth, this year's World No Tobacco Day theme, *“Unmasking the Appeal,”* aims to shed light on these manipulative strategies and raise awareness about their impact.

Tobacco companies deliberately target children and youth through their marketing strategies to replace the customers lost each year to tobacco-related illness and deaths. These strategies, which are designed to conceal the real harm of tobacco and nicotine products, consistently try to increase the attractiveness of such products to young audiences. These strategies not only attempt to normalize tobacco use among youth but also undermine public health policies.

Some deceptive strategies operating in our country include:

- Creating a glamorized image of tobacco products among children and youth through social media, newspapers, magazines, and television.
- Employing hired models to smoke cigarettes at events and venues frequented by youth, to portray smoking as appealing.
- Introducing alternative tobacco products in the form of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) with different designs and flavors.
- Generating interest and curiosity in tobacco products through targeted advertisements and packaging displayed in locations frequented by youth and children, alongside disclaimers such as “Not for sale to minors”.

At present, tobacco products are increasingly being rejected, particularly by the younger generation. In response, the tobacco industry is implementing various strategies such as reconstructing and redesigning tobacco products in an attempt to expand their customer base. One especially deceptive practice is marketing e-cigarettes as “safer alternatives” which are “less harmful”, more “socially acceptable” and “trendy”. However, there is no scientific basis for these claims. The industry narratives falsely market e-cigarettes as a smoking-cessation aid, yet research shows that people who use e-cigarettes often become “dual users,” continuing to use traditional tobacco products as well. The tobacco industry’s portrayal of these products is misleading and dangerous.

Tobacco use remains a significant public health, economic, social, and environmental issue in Sri Lanka. According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (2020), 19.4% overall (3.2 million adults) currently used tobacco. The survey reported the prevalence of smoking in Sri Lanka as 9.1% (1.5 million adults), indicating a declining trend over the years resulting from Sri Lanka’s commitment to tobacco prevention. However, tobacco use continues to be responsible for approximately 20,000 preventable deaths each year, placing a considerable burden on the

country's healthcare system and resulting in significant economic losses. Moreover, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death worldwide, while accounting for 83% of all deaths in Sri Lanka. Tobacco has been identified as one of the four main risk factors for NCDs, further contributing to the health burden.

The economic impact of smoking is substantial, with Sri Lankans spending around LKR 520 million daily on cigarettes, further intensifying the financial hardships experienced by individuals, families and communities. Tobacco use negatively impacts families by displacing spending on essential needs such as food and education, pushing households—especially those already vulnerable—into poverty. On the other hand, cigarette tax revenue in 2019 totaled LKR 92.9 billion, whereas the health and economic costs due to smoking amounted to LKR 214 billion, significantly outweighing the revenue generated from cigarette excise duty (The Case for Investing in WHO FCTC Implementation in Sri Lanka - 2019).

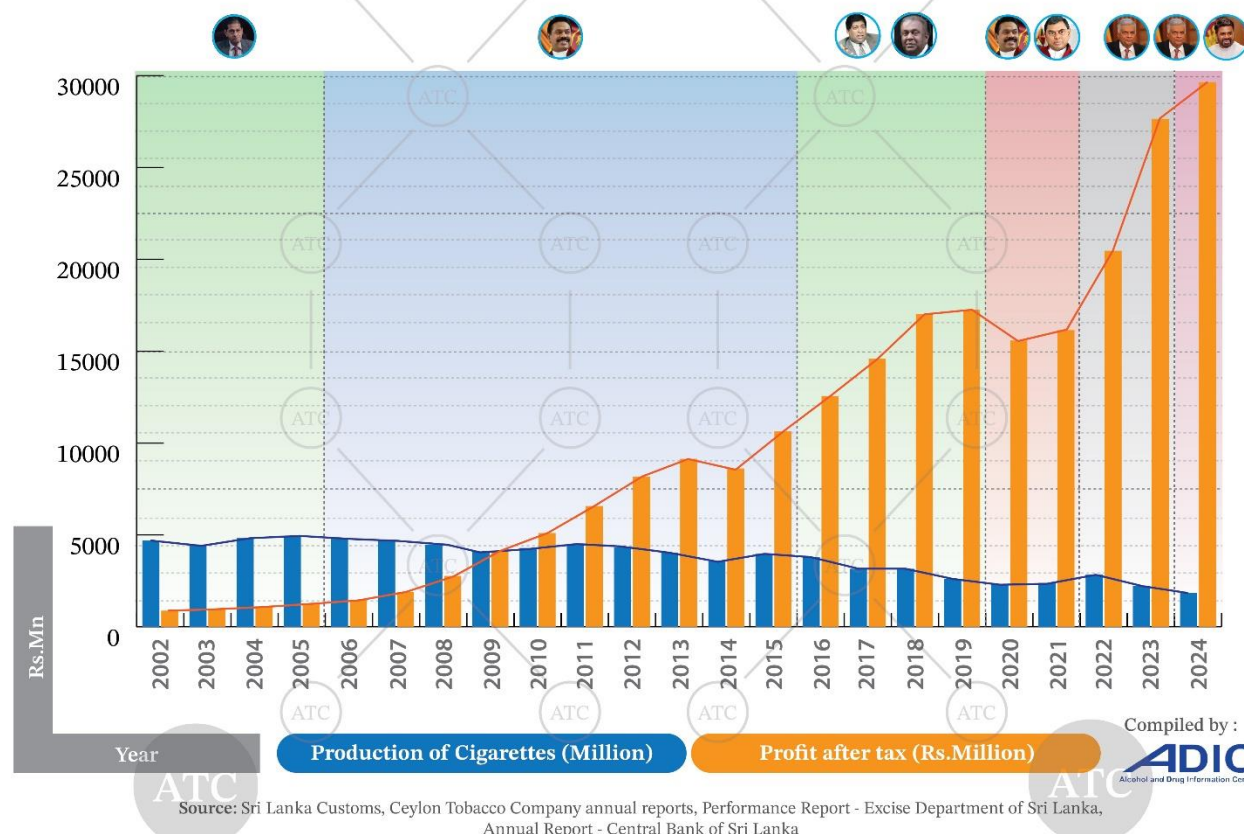
Environmentally, the impact of tobacco is alarming. Every day, around 4.9 million plastic cigarette filters (1.8 billion per year) are discarded in Sri Lanka, releasing over 7,000 toxic chemicals into land and marine ecosystems. This widespread pollution poses a severe threat to biodiversity.

Sri Lanka has seen progress in tobacco control over the years, especially as a result of community interventions that have taken place in all regions of the country, as well as the exposure of tobacco industry interferences and emergence of community efforts counteracting these interferences. In addition, the establishment of the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) Act in 2006 and Sri Lanka's ratification of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 has contributed towards tobacco control in the country. However, effective implementation of established policies remains a challenge due to continued industry interference, especially concerning taxation. Although cigarette taxes have risen, the tobacco industry continues to earn disproportionate profits. For instance, while the excise tax on the most sold cigarette category increased by Rs. 4.51 per stick, companies raised retail prices by Rs. 10, pocketing a significant portion of the profit difference. The government revenue from cigarette taxes fell by Rs. 6 billion in 2024, a consequence of Sri Lanka's flawed cigarette taxation policy. According to Verite Research, the tax-to-price ratio for cigarettes has fallen to its lowest point in over 15 years, currently ranging between 67% and 69%, well below the WHO-recommended 75%.

Over the past decade, cigarette sales in Sri Lanka have declined by 54%. However, the Ceylon Tobacco Company's (CTC) profit after tax increased by 179% during the same period, highlighting how poor tax policy enables excessive corporate profits at the public's expense. This situation is demonstrated through the graph below.

Profit & Production of Ceylon Tobacco Company (CTC)* Under different Finance Ministers in Sri Lanka

*SUBSIDIARY OF BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO (BAT)



There is an urgent need to revise the current cigarette taxation framework to be more efficient and equitable.

To combat these challenges, the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC) recommends a multi-pronged strategy:

- Introduce a systematic and scientifically sound cigarette taxation policy framework.
- Ban the sale of cigarettes as single sticks.
- Establishment of a Tobacco-Free Generation to prevent the sale of tobacco products to individuals born after 2010.
- Ban tobacco sales within 100 meters of educational institutions.
- Implement a national level school program to educate children on the harm of tobacco products and deceptive tactics used by the tobacco industry.

- The seizure of all types of e-cigarettes that have been banned from the market and introducing specified penalties for offenses committed under the 2016 amendment to the NATA Act No. 7 of 2006.
- Introduce plain packaging.
- Ban cigarette filters.
- Prohibit the sales of tobacco products over the internet.
- Strengthen enforcement of the NATA Act and adopt its proposed amendments.

Protecting youth and vulnerable populations from tobacco industry interferences requires active participation from all sectors of society—government, health sector, civil society, schools, and the public. Strengthening tobacco control policies, improving public awareness, and resisting industry interference are vital steps toward minimizing tobacco related harm in Sri Lanka. The public must be educated to recognize and challenge the deceptive marketing tactics used by tobacco companies. Ultimately, tobacco companies must be held accountable for the harm their products and practices inflict on individuals and communities.

Alcohol & Drug Information Centre (ADIC)