



Monday, February 18, 2013  
Main Issue Page 11

[AA](#) << Back to Headlines      Next >>

## TIMES NOTEBOOK We must implement tobacco picture labelling now



[+ Enlarge Image](#)

Times Notebook congratulates Suriname for passing comprehensive tobacco legislation last week. We sincerely hope that Suriname will implement the law more diligently than Trinidad, and we sincerely hope that the Health Ministry here will move quickly to table Guyana's own tobacco legislation.

But Times Notebook deplores the tardiness of Caricom countries on a matter which clearly impacts on the health of people across the region. No Caricom country has implemented picture labelling on tobacco packaging. How can we be so robust in rhetoric about the health of the region being the wealth of the region when we refuse to implement what research and experience have taught us – that picture labelling works? Our governments and legislatures have abrogated their responsibilities to the welfare of their people and are guilty of gross neglect of the health of their people. This is particularly damning because the global assault on the chronic Non- Communicable Diseases ( NCDs) was given a major boost when the leaders of these countries met in September 2007 in Port of Spain and signed the Port of Spain Declaration on the NCDs, which targeted tobacco control.

Historic treaty The coming into force of the first ever health treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005 was a historic event. It was endorsed at the World Health Assembly in 2003, where Guyana was represented by Minister Leslie Ramsammy. More than 170 countries ratified or acceded to the FCTC by 2012.

Guyana acceded to the treaty on December 14, 2005 and was among the first of many countries to either ratify or accede to the FCTC. Guyana played a major role in crafting the FCTC; the then minister of health, Dr Leslie Ramsammy, was a major player between 2001 and 2011 at the World Health Organisation ( WHO) as the treaty was being formulated and as the world begun to implement the FCTC. On February 1 2013, The Bahamas failed to meet the deadline to implement picture labelling on tobacco packaging in accordance with Article 11 of the FCTC. Guyana's deadline, however, was passed more than four years ago, on December 14, 2008. \*\* Indeed, other than St Vincent and the Grenadines and St Kitts, which have until 2014, every Caricom country has failed to meet the deadline to implement picture labelling on tobacco packaging.

A picture says a thousand words and conveys messages with far more impact than can a text- only message.

Pursuant to Article 11 of the WHO FCTC, all packages of tobacco products must carry health warnings, which “ should be 50 per cent or more of the principal display areas but shall be no less than 30 per cent of the display areas” and may be in the form of or include picture warnings, must be in the national language, must be rotated, must apply to cartons and other outer packages sold to consumers, and must be applied to all categories of tobacco products.

Each country must implement warning requirements within three years after the FCTC comes into force for that country.

Cost- effective Health warnings on packages of tobacco products are a highly cost- effective means of health communication.

Package warnings reach every smoker every day and are always working, 24 hours per day, seven days per week. A pack- aday smoker would take his or her pack out 20 times per day, 7300 times per year.

Warnings are also seen by the smoker's family, friends, and co- workers. As a result of health warnings, consumers receive more information, not less. Consumers are entitled to be fully informed of the many health effects of tobacco products, and the package is the best way to do that.

Health departments determine the content of warnings, but the tobacco industry pays the cost. With such an extraordinary reach, it is not surprising that so many governments are improving package warning requirements. The tobacco industry opposes larger, picture warnings. But if such warnings do not work, then why the industry is so STRONGLY opposed? In December 2012, Caricom's Commission for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) finally endorsed the CROSQ (Caricom's Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality) standard for picture labelling on tobacco packaging. It took more than three years for the CROSQ standard to be agreed to among health ministries in Caricom and another three years before COTED agreed to it.

Since December when COTED finally endorsed CROSQ's standards for picture labelling on tobacco packages, nothing has happened.

Guyana's Health Ministry has been quiet, as all the health ministries in the region have been. This is unforgivable.

Canada was the first country to implement picture labelling in 2001, prior to the FCTC. By the end of 2012, 63 countries had implemented picture labelling in accordance with the FCTC obligations, covering more than 40 per cent of the world's population. None of Caricom's citizens is protected, even though our leaders are so vociferous on the global stage about the health of our nations being the wealth of our region.

Australia now has the largest warnings in the world at 82.5 per cent of the package front and back (75 per cent front, 90 per cent back), surpassing Uruguay that had led at 80 per cent.

Australia has also implemented plain packaging to prohibit tobacco company colours, logos, and design elements on the brand part of the package. Brunei and Canada recently increased package warnings' size from 50 to 75 per cent, Sri Lanka adopted a new regulation for 80 per cent warnings, and Ecuador improved warnings from 40 per cent text to 60 per cent pictures. Fortyseven countries have warnings covering at least 50 per cent of the package front and back, up from 32 in 2010 and 24 in 2008. Eighteen countries have warnings covering more than 50 per cent of the package front and back.

What is happening to us IN CARICOM? Given our Port of Spain Declaration, Times Notebook wonders if this is just another of the good talk, with no commitment! Shame on us in Guyana and the Caribbean! The Health Ministry of Guyana must stand up now! [Times Notebook is a regular weekly feature.

It appears each Monday.

Comments through email and facebook are welcome.

The email address is times.

notebook@gmail.com]

---

<< Back to Headlines

Next >> [AAA](#)