



Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control

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OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA AND THE PEOPLE OF JAMAICA

The Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control is becoming increasingly concerned about the decision to expand the production of tobacco growing in Jamaica which is in direct contravention of the World Health Organization (WHO) Treaty - The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which the Government of Jamaica signed on September 24, 2003 and ratified on July 7, 2005. In 2003, the WHO established this first ever public health treaty in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic. The WHO reports that tobacco use is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced. It kills more than five million people a year – an average of one person every six seconds – and accounts for one in 10 adult deaths. Up to half of current users will eventually die of a tobacco-related disease. Based on current mortality due to tobacco smoking, evidence is that 75% of the mortality from smoking will be in developing countries, and in Jamaica, with a larger percentage of hypertension and diabetes, the evidence is that these diseases will increase mortality to a considerable degree.

The signatories of the FCTC are legally bound by the treaty's provisions. The treaty has articles which address issues related to tobacco control such as protection from exposure to tobacco smoke, price and tax measures to reduce the demand for tobacco, non price measures to reduce the demand for tobacco, packaging and labeling of tobacco products, regulation of the contents of tobacco products, tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, the provision of support for economically viable alternative activities and guidelines on interactions with the tobacco industry.

In addition to the expansion of tobacco production, the Government is also in breach of the treaty obligations as it relates to the passing of tobacco control legislation. This legislation had been promised on many occasions and it is yet to become a reality. One of the provisions of this legislation is the banning of smoking in public places in order to protect the health of the population from the effects of second hand tobacco smoke. This legislation has already been enacted in many countries of the world including Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados.

In contravention of this treaty, the Government through the Ministry of Education and the Child Development Agency has been collaborating with the tobacco company in the promotion of youth anti tobacco campaigns. This was launched in 2010 and had the endorsement of these two agencies. Research has proven that such a programme has the opposite effect of what, which on the face of it, is intended to be achieved. In fact it actually results in more young people starting to smoke.

Member Organizations:

Association of General Practitioners of Jamaica • Caribbean College of Family Physicians, Jamaica Chapter
Caribbean Public Health Association • Diabetes Association of Jamaica • Jamaica Cancer Society • Nurses Association of Jamaica
The Heart Foundation of Jamaica • The Medical Association of Jamaica

In addition to the foregoing, the Government has been accepting financial support from the tobacco company such as the recent acceptance of \$ 2.7m to repair police vehicles. While this gesture at first glance would seem like a good thing, there is a conflict of interest. The corporate social responsibility of the tobacco industry is, according to WHO FCTC, an inherent contradiction, as the industry's core functions are in conflict with the goals of public health policies with respect to tobacco control.

The issue of the revenue generated from the tobacco industry is commonly raised. The World Bank examined in a 1999 Report, "Curbing the Epidemic, Governments and the Economics of Tobacco Control", the economic questions that policymakers must address when contemplating tobacco control. This report demonstrates that the economic fears deterring policymakers from taking action are largely unfounded. Policies that reduce the demand for tobacco, such as a decision to increase tobacco taxes, do not cause long-term job losses in the vast majority of countries. Further, despite fears to the contrary, higher tobacco taxes do not reduce overall tax revenues; rather, revenues climb in the short and medium term following an increase in tobacco taxes. Thus, such demand reduction policies could bring unprecedented health benefits without any detriment to national economies.

It is also very important to note that this situation is occurring in the following context:

- In addition to being a signatory to the FCTC, in September 2007 there was a meeting in Port of Spain Trinidad which all the heads of Government of the region attended. The meeting was entitled: **DECLARATION OF PORT-OF-SPAIN: UNITING TO STOP THE EPIDEMIC OF CHRONIC NON COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**. At this historic meeting, the heads of government all signed the Port of Spain Declaration part of which stated :

"Our commitment to pursue immediately a legislative agenda for passage of the legal provisions related to the International Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; urge its immediate ratification in all States which have not already done so and support the immediate enactment of legislation to limit or eliminate smoking in public places, ban the sale, advertising and promotion of tobacco products to children, insist on effective warning labels and introduce such fiscal measures as will reduce accessibility of tobacco; That public revenue derived from tobacco, alcohol or other such products should be employed, inter alia for preventing chronic NCD's, promoting health and supporting the work of the Commissions"

- In recognition of the global epidemic of chronic non communicable disease – cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes - in September this year, the United Nations General Assembly will be holding the first ever summit on this topic. It is a source of great pride to the Caribbean region that this summit was initiated by CARICOM. This fact has received widespread praise and recognition internationally.

- In preparation for the UN meeting, 2 co-facilitators have been chosen. They are **Ambassador Raymond Wolfe Permanent Representative of Jamaica (New York)** and Ambassador Sylvie Lucas Permanent Representative of Luxembourg (New York).
- Jamaica and the region stand to be embarrassed internationally, if, at the United Nations General Assembly, it is found that the Government of Jamaica is in breach of the FCTC, in particular by encouraging the expansion of tobacco production in Jamaica especially given the that the PM of Jamaica is the CARICOM chair.

Tobacco smoking is the only legally available product that kills when used exactly as the manufacturer intended. One of the roles of the government is to protect the public health interest of the population and its policies should reflect this. We are calling on the Government of Jamaica to address these pressing issues and to advise what is their position in relation to the FCTC and Jamaica's obligations. The Government of Jamaica ought not to be promoting the use of tobacco which is known to be the second leading cause of worldwide mortality; and here in Jamaica and the Caribbean, it is making a notable contribution to mortality caused by the three leading causes of death in CARICOM countries.



Dr. Knox Hagley, CD, MB, FRCP, FRCPE

Chairman

The Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control