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## **Regional alliance congratulates Thailand's Health Minister on 85% health warnings on cigarette pack**

**Bangkok, 11 March 2013:** The Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) on 11 March 2013 congratulated Dr Pradith Sinthawanarong, Minister of Health, Thailand on the signing of regulations that would soon require 85% graphic health warnings (GHW) on cigarette packs in Thailand.

Thailand's Minister of health signed the regulation to increase health warning labels on tobacco products from the current 55% to 85% on Friday, 8th March 2013. The implementation date will be within 6 months after the regulation is printed in the Gazette, which normally takes one month after the Minister has signed.

SEATCA Director Ms. Bungon Ritthiphakdee said: "SEATCA is ecstatic and would like to convey our heartiest congratulations to Thailand for its leadership in tobacco control. Its enactment of rules to put in place the largest GHWs on cigarette packs speaks to its political will and example to safeguard the health of its people.

With this development, however, SEATCA warned that the tobacco industry and its front groups including tobacco farmers will likely lobby to fight and block the regulation. Just last month, the Thai Tobacco Trade Association (allegedly funded by Phillip Morris), submitted a letter to the Ministry of Health, Thailand, opposing the new GHW policy.

"When countries strengthen their policies, there is no doubt the tobacco industry will challenge the legislation especially measures that reduce tobacco consumption. They have tried to delay Tobacco Control laws that are stringent, fight tobacco tax increases, and dilute bans on tobacco advertising sponsorship and promotions time and again." Ritthiphakdee adds.

In the ASEAN region, the tobacco industry poses many other challenges. The industry works to block laws on 100-percent smoke-free policies in public and work places and fights product regulations such as those banning the adding of flavourings in tobacco. (Flavourings are insidious as they are added to lure younger people into smoking.)

Currently, Australia has the largest graphic health warnings in the world at 82.5% (75% of front and 90% of back). Uruguay has the largest at 80% on front and back - pending regulations in Sri Lanka, they have 80% on front and back. Other countries in the ASEAN with GHW's are Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia. (ENDS)