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World No Tobacco Day 2015 – Put an end to the illicit trade of tobacco products

For World No Tobacco Day 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on countries to band together to stop tobacco smuggling. An important political tool for achieving this goal is the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. For this year's World No Tobacco Day, the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum - DKFZ) will publish an official German version of the protocol, with the goal of raising awareness to policy makers and the public about its value as a tool for combating illicit trade. DKFZ also aims to encourage policy makers to ratify the protocol, since 40 parties that have signed the protocol will also have to ratify it in order to implement effective enforcement strategies.

According to the World Customs Organization, in 2012 customs officers confiscated almost two billion cigarettes in the European Union – about 95 percent of all cigarettes that were seized worldwide. Illicit trade in tobacco products costs the European Union between nine and eleven billion euros every year. In addition, it undermines successful measures to reduce tobacco consumption such as raising the tobacco tax.

Smuggled cigarettes are cheaper than legal ones. Therefore, they increase tobacco consumption and get young people hooked on smoking. Moreover, contraband cigarettes display insufficient or no health warnings and may thus deceive consumers about the health hazards of smoking.

WHO created the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products as part of the first worldwide health treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). It presents effective measures to prevent the trafficking of tobacco and to curb cigarette smuggling. Countries that sign and ratify the protocol have to establish a tracking and tracing system for tobacco products in order to better track the movement of tobacco products through the supply chain from manufacturer to vendor. In addition, it foresees the establishment of licensing measures for all parties in the supply chain.

The protocol also regulates the mutual exchange of information, facilitates legal collaboration among countries, and defines and extends criminal prosecution of offenses in the context of illicit trading.

Criminal networks are not the only ones responsible for the illicit trade of tobacco products – the tobacco industry is also involved in it. “The tobacco industry is complicit in illegal trade. Smuggling is one of its business strategies,” said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan in a speech to the 16th World Conference on Tobacco or Health in March 2015. Therefore, DKFZ's publication for World No Tobacco Day 2015 also describes strategies used by the tobacco industry to undermine measures aimed at curtailing tobacco smuggling.

The protocol does not become legally binding for the countries that have signed it until 40 of them have also ratified it. To date, 53 parties and the European Union have signed the protocol, but only seven of them have ratified it.

“Germany is one of the countries that has signed the protocol but has not yet ratified it,” says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of the WHO Collaborating Center for Tobacco Control at

the DKFZ. "If Germany ratified the protocol, it would not only be a model for other countries to follow but would also send a signal to the tobacco lobby that German politicians refuse to be exploited against the protocol."

The DKFZ publication is available for download at:

http://www.dkfz.de/de/tabakkontrolle/download/fctc/FCTC_Illegaler_Handel.pdf

The book can be ordered free of charge at: WHO-CC@dkfz.de

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) with its more than 3,000 employees is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany. At DKFZ, more than 1,000 scientists investigate how cancer develops, identify cancer risk factors and endeavor to find new strategies to prevent people from getting cancer. They develop novel approaches to make tumor diagnosis more precise and treatment of cancer patients more successful. The staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. Jointly with Heidelberg University Hospital, DKFZ has established the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg, where promising approaches from cancer research are translated into the clinic. In the German Consortium for Translational Cancer Research (DKTK), one of six German Centers for Health Research, DKFZ maintains translational centers at seven university partnering sites. Combining excellent university hospitals with high-profile research at a Helmholtz Center is an important contribution to improving the chances of cancer patients. DKFZ is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers, with ninety percent of its funding coming from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the remaining ten percent from the State of Baden-Württemberg.

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