



Namibia: Tobacco Lobby Continues Fight Against Plain Packaging

BY IRENE IHOAÉS, 7 FEBRUARY 2013

Windhoek — The Tobacco Institute of Southern Africa (TISA) is displeased with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and with Namibia's adamant stance to implement the Tobacco Products Control Act No. 1 of 2010 in line with WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

The legislation will black out marketing and promotion of tobacco products in the country and restrict tobacco vending machines to controlled areas with an 18-year age limit.

The Act also prohibits sponsorship of any Namibian event, however charitable, by tobacco companies or distributors of tobacco products.

"While we support sensible tobacco control programmes, focusing on education and awareness of harmful products, there is no proof that plain packaging will have any effect on the uptake of a harmful product," TISA said in response to remarks made at the opening of the Regional Consultative Meeting on Tobacco and Trade on Monday in Windhoek.

Governments worldwide are pursuing similar policies of plain packaging for tobacco products, with some governments opting for somewhat roundabout plain packaging methods that increase the size of the compulsory health warnings, thus leaving very little space for branding. Tobacco companies and their lobbyists have initiated parallel lawsuits in various countries, threats that were dealt an unprecedented blow when the Australian courts threw such lawsuits out of the courts. Australia, Canada and several Asian countries have already implemented some measure of plain packaging with huge graphic health warnings on cigarette boxes. The United Kingdom is seriously considering implementing similar legislation.

TISA is however threatening governments in Southern Africa with lawsuits.

Tobacco companies operating in Namibia have already threatened to sue government if it implements the legislation, saying there is no proof plain packaging would reduce smoking.

"Taking away a company's branding may infringe international copyright and intellectual property law," TISA further argues.

The Namibian Act would prohibit the display of wording such as "mild, low tar or light" on cigarette boxes or any other tobacco products, because they create the impression that such a specific tobacco product is less harmful than others. The legislation is also aiming to prevent packaging that advertises and promotes tobacco products.

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