

**Stella Bialous, UCSF WHO Collaborating Center**

Re: Report on Sensitization Workshop on Tobacco Industry Interference – Implementation and Enforcement of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Venue: Hotel Torarica, Ballroom, Paramaribo, Suriname

Date: 9 – 10 November 2017

The goals of the workshop were to 1) identify and discuss the tobacco industry (TI) interference with tobacco control with focus on TI's corporate social responsibility; 2) discuss the role of government ministries, agencies and their counterparts that may have an interest and capacity to affect public health policies in the implementation of the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 as outlined in the tobacco control act in Suriname; 3) discuss the implementation of the Code of Conduct (Ethics) for public aligned with Article 5.3 of the FCTC and its guidelines.

The workshop was facilitated by Stella Bialous, a faculty member of the Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education of the University of California San Francisco, a WHO Collaborating Center.

Participants from a wide range of sectors, including health, finance, trade and industry, agriculture, justice and police, regional development, districts commissioners, sport and youth affairs, education, labor, transport and communication, NIMOS, Bureau of Public Health (BOG) media, legal department of agencies/ministries.

Opening remarks by PAHO Country Director, Dr. Gebre, highlighted the significance of the FCTC and of Article 5.3 in preventing tobacco industry's interference with tobacco control implementation, followed by a more detailed. Presentation and discussion of the FCTC, the tobacco epidemic and the progress of tobacco control. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Maureen Wijngaarde spoke about tobacco control progress in Suriname, including a decline in prevalence. The main components of the Tobacco Control Act were presented to participants.

The opening sessions were followed by questions and answers and the participants were fully engaged. The potential for language barrier was quickly resolved with participants speaking in Dutch as per their choice, with PAHO and MoH representatives assisting with translation.

After the initial sessions, which served to ensure that all participants were equally informed about the Tobacco Control Act, the FCTC and particularly about tobacco industry strategies to derail tobacco control, the workshop's agenda focused on more interactive activities to engage all participants in understanding the role of several governmental agencies in implementing tobacco control and in protecting the Tobacco Control Act from tobacco industry's interference. The agenda was adjusted to meet the information and discussion needs of the participants.

Throughout the workshop participants had an opportunity to discuss, in depth, the Tobacco Control Act and its implications, enforcement and compliance requirements. The discussing of the Act including issues related to smokefree legislation, regulation, taxation and smuggling, regulation of the tobacco industry (and the fact that there are two new manufacturing facilities installed in the country, but they do not sell domestically yet).

Although the original intent was not to discuss e-cigarettes, there was a lot of interest from participants in understanding the relationship between e-cigarettes and tobacco control, definitions, health impact among other regulatory questions. Therefore, a significant part of the agenda at the end of the first day and beginning of second day was dedicated to understanding the policy issued and implications related to e-cigarettes, the framework within which they should or should not be available and what enforcement mechanisms currently exist to address e-cigarettes.

Another significant topic of discussion was the development of arguments to counter the tobacco industry claims that increase in taxes automatically leads to increase in illicit tobacco trade and crime.

Half of the second day was spent discussing existing policy measures that can be applied towards the implementation of Article 5.3. There is a code of conduct for civil service already, as well as legislation regulating civil service that would address several aspects of Article 5.3 implementation vis-à-vis avoiding conflict of interest between the public sector and the tobacco industry.

The participants agreed that the next step should be the creation of a formal inter-sectoral body, with representation from all relevant ministries, to engage in the implementation of the Tobacco Act. Participants went through an in-depth evaluation of the strengths of creating such a body, with leadership of MoH, but active engagement of all Ministries. Participants highlighted that the workshop was, for many of them, the first time they had an opportunity to discuss tobacco control with colleagues from different government sectors.

The workshop was closed by remarks from The Minister of Health, Mr. Pengel.

### **Recommendations for follow up:**

- 1) Create a formal inter-sectoral body for tobacco control (hereafter a “committee” but other formal arrangements are possible), led by MoH and with representatives appointed by all relevant ministries (at a minimum, those already represented in the workshop). A key goal of this body is to facilitate communication between departments.
- 2) This “committee” development could adapt existing terms of references (from other countries in the region); it is essential that no “committee” representative be in actual or perceived conflict of interest, i.e. representing or aligned with the interests of the tobacco industry.

- 3) Once the “committee” has been established, it can initiate the development of a work plan focused on the Code of Conduct from Ministry of Home Affairs. This assessment will determine the Code is appropriate for use in the context of Article 5.3, or if amendments will be needed (and if so, which is the best process to make these amendments). Results of this assessment, and the content of the Code needs to be widely disseminated, thus a communication strategy should be developed by the “committee”.
- 4) Tobacco industry strategies to undermine the FCTC, including the creation of MoUs with different government sectors, need to be widely disseminated within government, an activity that could be coordinated by this new “committee”.
- 5) Address the issue of regulating the availability of e-cigarettes, which are included in the Tobacco Act but enforcement has been hampered by business incentives policies and need to follow up with Chamber of Commerce.
- 6) Continue to take advantage of the Health in All Policies approach. A request was made that when the Minister of Health presents to Cabinet the concept of such a inter-sectoral “committee”.
- 7) Government should be made aware of legal and technical resources available through the FCTC Secretariat and PAHO to support implementation of the FCTC, including Article 5.3( Note: implementation resources provided by the Secretariat <http://www.who.int/fctc/implementation/en/> including a listing of knowledge hubs on a variety of specific topics: <http://www.who.int/fctc/implementation/knowledge-management/en/>
- 8) PAHO to provide technical assistance in implementing the actions suggested by workshop participants.