



Truth not tobacco industry misinformation about harm reduction: from Manila to Panama

Panama City, 7 February: News feeds in the Philippines regarding the ongoing tenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP10) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) are being fed half-truths and misinformation from the tobacco industry.

In its opening statement at the start of the weeklong COP10, the Philippine delegation eagerly announced declining smoking rates and proceeded to tout the Vaporized Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Products Regulation Act (Republic Act No. 11900) as landmark tobacco control legislation when, in fact, the drops in smoking prevalence are a result of sin tax law reforms beginning in 2012. RA 11900 passed into law only in 2022 and removed public health protections provided in the sin tax law by (1) decreasing the minimum allowable age of sale from 21 to 18 years old, (2) allowing flavors other than tobacco and menthol, and (3) transferring the regulation of these tobacco products from the pro-health Food and Drug Administration to the pro-tobacco industry Department of Trade and Industry.

Further, the delegation failed to share that the latest Global Youth Tobacco Survey showed that [14% of Filipino adolescents aged 13-15 years](#) currently use e-cigarettes, while 24.6% had ever used e-cigarettes, more than double the percentage in 2015. The [increasing uptake of e-cigarettes](#) among young people is a worrying global trend.

The tobacco industry aggressively promotes its newer nicotine products to youths and non-smokers with thousands of false but attention-grabbing messages on [social media](#), more than 15,000 fruity and fun flavors, and many appealing e-cigarette forms, including toys, confectionery, and school supplies. This is classic harm initiation and not harm reduction.

Ahead of COP10, [former health and education officials](#) had appealed to the Philippine delegation to take a stand against electronic smoking devices (ESD), such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, to prevent the rise of another generation addicted to nicotine.

ESDs produce thousands of toxic chemicals in addition to nicotine, which is [poisonous and addictive](#). Scientific evidence also shows that ESDs are [ineffective for smoking cessation](#), as a large proportion of smokers using ESDs continue smoking conventional cigarettes (dual use) rather than quit smoking. The harm reduction (95% safer) myth promoted by the tobacco industry is simply harm replacement.

Tobacco harm reduction groups are attacking WHO and the WHO FCTC, which recommends that governments regulate e-cigarettes by prohibiting or restricting their manufacture, marketing, sale, and use.



“It is lamentable that misinformation is proliferating in the Philippines about harm reduction, muddling the facts about the harms of electronic smoking devices. These lies are being spread to mislead the public, and we urge everyone to seek accurate, scientific information from reputable public institutions,” Managing Director of HealthJustice Philippines, Ralph Degollacion noted.

“The public deserves the truth and accurate information, not the lies of the tobacco industry that kills 8 million people every year. It is important, now more than ever, to stop the misinformation about tobacco harm reduction. The evidence is clear: ESDs are targeted at youths, cause serious health and environmental harms, and do not help most smokers quit smoking,” said Dr Ulysses Dorotheo, Executive Director of the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance.

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About SEATCA

SEATCA is a multi-sectoral non-governmental alliance promoting health and saving lives by assisting ASEAN countries to accelerate and effectively implement the tobacco control measures contained in the WHO FCTC. Acknowledged by governments, academic institutions, and civil society for its advancement of tobacco control in Southeast Asia, the WHO bestowed on SEATCA the World No Tobacco Day Award in 2004 and the WHO Director-General’s Special Recognition Award in 2014.