

The Faculty of Health Sciences and the Tobacco Control Research Group at the American University of Beirut position statement:

Lebanon cannot afford tobacco industry-supported loopholes in new tobacco control law

For the past fifty years, multinational tobacco companies have had the freedom to sell and market to adults and children in Lebanon a dangerous product specifically engineered to be addictive. They have also consciously thwarted previous policy attempts to limit the reach of this harmful product. Today we have a historic opportunity to end five decades of the tobacco industry being given a free reign over public health policy in Lebanon. The industry should not be allowed to weaken tobacco control policy.

Lebanon ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), in December 2005 . However, to this date, it still has one of the weakest tobacco control policies in the Middle East region and implementation is already past due time. Experts estimate that in Lebanon 150,000 children and 350,000 adults alive today will die prematurely because of smoking or second hand smoke, unless tobacco control measures are improved.

The FCTC, an international treaty that is based on **best evidence**, outlines the elements of a strong tobacco control policy. Experience from countries worldwide in implementing FCTC policies has illustrated immediate health gains. This evidence is documented in the international public health and medical literature. It is imperative that we optimize on this global knowledge base and experience of countries when adopting a Lebanese tobacco control law.

The Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Justice is currently (February 2010) discussing a proposed tobacco control draft law. Adoption of a weak tobacco control law will have devastating health consequences resulting in countless preventable disabilities and death on the Lebanese population for years to come.

We consider the following three measures the cornerstone of a sensible and effective tobacco control policy:

- 1- **Total bans of smoking in indoor public places without exemptions and without permission for smoking and non-smoking areas.**
- 2- **Total comprehensive advertising bans, both direct and indirect (including promotion, branding, etc.)**
- 3- **Large pictorial health warnings on tobacco products at least 40% on two larger surfaces of the pack with rotating messages every six months to avoid wear-out.**

We outline here an explanation of why these must be adopted and why half-measures should not be allowed.

