

## **Press Release**

### **"Supporting the enforcement of Law 174 and refusing any amendment"**

**October 17, 2012**

Under the slogan "Support the enforcement of Law 174 and say no to amendments", a meeting was held at the "Doctors' Syndicate in Lebanon" in cooperation with the "Tobacco Control Citizen Watch" and the "Tobacco Control Research Group at the American University of Beirut." The meeting at "Beit al Tabib" was attended by a number of professionals including heads of syndicates (pharmacists, physiotherapists, dentists, nurses, lawyers, and editors), trade unions, presidents of universities and of schools in Lebanon, civil society organizations, the private sector, parliamentarians, and media organizations.

The assembly encompassed distinctive speakers: Dr. Sharaf Abu Sharaf, the President of the Order of Physicians, Dr. Hassan el-Bushra WHO representative in Lebanon, Dr. Atef Majdalani, Chairman of the Health Committee in Parliament, Dr. Walid Ammar the General Director of the Ministry of Health, Mr. Fouad Fleifel the General Director of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, Mr. Eli Bsiebes the head of the Syndicate of Engineers, Maitre Fadi Brakat the representative of the President of the Syndicate of Lawyers and Council Member of the Syndicate, Mr. Bishara Shaya the president of the Federation of Trade Unions and hotels', restaurants', and cafes' staff workers, Mr. Marwan Al-Khauili the president of the Federation of Trade Unions, Mr. Asaad Mirza president of the insurance companies, Dr. Peter Dorman the president of the American University of Beirut, Dr. Joseph Jabbra the president of the Lebanese American University, Dr. Nina Zaidan the Dean of the Faculty of Public Health representing the President of Lebanese University, and Father Boutros Azar the Secretary General of the Catholic schools and coordinator of the Union of educational institutions in Lebanon.

In his speech Dr. Sharaf Abu Sharaf, stated that a country that does not respect the lives of its citizens should not be considered as a country, and that trading with citizen's health is an unforgivable crime. Also, he noted that global studies confirm that diseases such as cancers are man-made. He also revealed some alarming facts that indicate the degree of severity of the use of tobacco within the Lebanese society. He stated: "The smoking reduction program study which was carried out by the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, showed that the Lebanese consume more than one million cigarette packs per day and that smoking tobacco is the leading cause of death in Lebanon (3500 cases per year)." He further added, that "around 80% and 75% of children are exposed to secondhand smoking in their homes and in public places, respectively. In addition, passive smoking for half an hour is equivalent to smoking 3-4 cigarettes. Moreover, 45% of teenagers smoke and 30% of which smoke hookah (equivalent to two packs of cigarettes). On the other hand, the environmental pollution caused by smoking is 10 times that produced by vehicles. Abu Sharaf, questioned "If South Africa banned smoking in nature reserves in order to preserve the health of the animals, then, why is it considered as exaggeration to ban smoking in closed public places in order to protect the health of citizens?" He finally concluded by stating "citizen's health should always remain above all other considerations."

Abou Shafra's speech was followed by the Representative of the World Health Organization in Lebanon, Dr. Hassan al-Bushra. Dr Al-Bushra congratulated the Lebanese government for this historic accomplishment, and encouraged them to go forward with enforcement. He stated that September 3, 2012 will remain as a historical event for the Lebanese state, as well as for the health of its citizens. In addition, that Lebanon will be an example for other countries in the fight against smoking, especially as the Eastern Mediterranean region suffers from high rates of non-communicable diseases, whereby the first cause is smoking." Al- Bushra said: "I was concerned about the tireless efforts of tobacco companies to impede the implementation of the law, where they began to develop amendments, which were inconsistent with the concept of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. For that reason WHO hopes that you apply the law strictly in order to preserve the health of citizens and their lives."

Succeeding, Al-Bushra's argument was Atef Majdalani, Chairman of the Health Committee in Parliament MP. Majdalani noted that this law was passed in the parliament with the majority approval of 128 parliamentarians. He further added that he absolutely refuses to amend the law. Majdlani thanked the citizens who guarded and protected the law enforcement and monitored its implementation. He said: "Dear citizen, your health is a right, defend this right!"

On the other hand, Dr. Walid Ammar, Director General of the Ministry of Health, stressed that the Ministry of Health is committed to implementing the law as it is, and it refuses to amend under any circumstances. He declared "This law is in compliance with the global agreement signed by the Ministry of Health and approved by the Parliament; any amendment will be for the sole beneficiary of the tobacco companies that were behind all of the false claims and studies. Perhaps some tourism enterprises were influenced in the beginning, but today we see these enterprises functioning normally without facing problems in the implementation of the law. Finally he added: "The Ministry of Health will not compromise the health of the Lebanese."

Then Mr. Fouad Fleifel, Director General of the Ministry of Economy and Trade. Fleifel reported that the number of patrols done by the Consumer Protection Directorate were 1151, out of which 87 were given fines which were referred to the judiciary system. In addition, he stressed that the patrols had experienced difficulties which were resolved with the collaboration of security forces. Finally, he emphasized that the Ministry of Economy and Trade supports the implementation of the law.

The president of Engineer's Syndicate, Mr. Elie Bseibes, confirmed the support of the law. Furthermore, he certified the contribution of the association to successful implementation of the law. This in turn, can be achieved by setting clear criteria for the concept of enclosed public places, which are all beyond a place with a ceiling and two walls, in addition to the ventilation standards in open public places, which allow smoking. Bseibes stressed that it was impossible for any ventilation system to purify indoor spaces from smoke. To strengthen his point, he assumed that if the above were true then it would have been required by some of the more advanced countries in tobacco control. He concluded by asking "Why do Lebanese respect the law

abroad, and commit to smoking outside, irrespective of the outside temperature, yet seek to amend the law in their country?"

While Maitre Fadi Brakat, representative of the president of the Syndicate of Lawyers and a member of the union lawyer cabinet mentioned that positive law always overcomes the natural right which is not changed according to time or place. Moreover, he pointed out that Lebanon is one of the founders of the United Nations and the establisher of Human Rights' convention, therefore is committed to the natural rights. He concluded by noting that Lebanon had approved the law 174 based on the "WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control", and thus any amendment to these laws must be for the better and not for the worse.

Mr. Bishara Shaya the Chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions and hotels', restaurants' and cafes' staff workers stressed that health and safety are of concern to everyone, and posed the question "Where is occupational health and safety?" He requested from citizens not to fire workers in order to fight the tobacco control law. He mentioned that "Smoking is not the actual reason for dismissing workers from their jobs, which is an inhumane act. Shaya concluded that smoking is hazardous to the health of workers in the tourism sector.

Mr. Marwan Khawli the President of the Federation of Trade Unions mentioned that "This law will transform public places from diseased places to healthy places, and protect our workers from inevitable diseases." He added that the workers' fault at restaurants and cafes is that they breathe where they work. He criticized those who say that smoking helps make our food taste better, by saying: "Shame on them, they are contaminating the Lebanese cuisine." Furthermore, Khawli emphasized that "Few stakeholders staged a fierce attack seeking all mafiatic, financial, and powerful roads to amend this law for their own interests, but we will not allow the possibility of amendments that kill our workers."

The president of the insurance companies Mr. Asad Mirza disclosed the large losses incurred by the health care sector from smoking-related diseases. He also revealed that the owners of insurance contracts in Europe and America, who are smokers, bear additional burdens and are subjected to additional tests. What's more, he invited other companies, who are members of the union, to support this law with all available means. He said: "If we as businessmen think about our workers as we think about our children, we would then support the implementation of the law 174."

On the other hand, President of the American University of Beirut, Dr. Peter Dorman pointed out that the implementation of the smoking ban in public places in the United States and other countries did not affect the profits of tourism, but increased the revenues for the health sector. He stated: "If smoking is an option, breathing is not an option!" He stressed that the law helps raise the personal responsibility of citizens. He pointed out that the American University of Beirut banned smoking on campus.

Dr. Jospheh Jabra, President of the Lebanese American University, said: "It is true that we have our personal freedom, but in societies our personal freedom stops when it opposes the freedom of another person or damages it or even if it was likely to harm it. So how when it comes to smoking which is fatal? He also added that the Lebanese American University banned smoking on campus.

Representative of the Lebanese University, Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, Dr. Nina Zaidan said: "We are interested in protecting our young people from the habit of smoking hookah, damage, and low physical activity that it causes." She further added: "exception in Lebanon became a rule, so we will stand with you all against all exceptions." She confirmed the pursuit of the Lebanese University to ban smoking inside the campus colleges.

Father Boutros Azar, General Secretary of the Catholic schools and coordinator of the Union of educational institutions in Lebanon, criticized those who claim that smoking reduces problems and asked: "isn't smoking and addiction the cause of mental and physical laziness and harm to our environment?" He dwelled on that schools educate generations to reject smoking - slavery, which leads addicts to think selfishly without taking into consideration the people around them. Moreover, he also mentioned that: "On behalf of the Catholic schools and Union of educational institutions in Lebanon, I say that we do not accept any compromise on our health and the health of generations. No for culture of death and Yes to the culture of life."

Finally, Rania Baroud, who presented the event, said that, in reference to the argument that says that nothing can oppose the implementation of laws, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, used to ask about the enforcement of laws even in the midst of World War II. Baroud indicated that the parliamentarian blocks support the law and refuse any amendments, revealing about interviews and meetings that were done with the heads of these blocks to confirm this position.

The meeting was attended, along with speakers, by the former minister MP Dr. Ahmed Fatfat, representative of the Future block, MP Dr. Bilal Farhat, representative Loyalty to the Resistance block, MP Dr. Imad Hout representatives of the Islamic Community, MP Dr. Ali Osseiran, MP D. Ammar Hourri, professor Eddie Abi Lamaa representative of the Lebanese Forces party, Mr. Zafer Nasser representative of the Progressive Socialist Party, Press Syndicate Mohammad Baalbaki, representatives of Lebanese universities and NGOs. During the meeting, a TV ad that highlighted waterpipe toxins was launched.

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