29.08.2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing you on behalf of the Sonarang. Our organization works closely with the Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA) and is interested in tobacco control because of our agenda to build up Public awareness anti-tobacco and Drug. Our activities are funded by the members and individual.

We are interested in the FCTC because of the vast potential it offers for saving lives and improving health of Bangladeshis, particularly the poor and most underserved.

Although I will not be present in Geneva to attend the hearings on the FCTC, I strongly support a strong convention. On behalf of my organization, I endorse the opinions in the attached document.

Respectfully yours,

M Rahmin
Chairman, Sonarang
phone : 9664079, 8611645
Tobacco use is a major problem in Bangladesh. In addition to all the well-publicized health effects are the detrimental effects on the environment and on individual and national economy. In addition, tobacco is likely used as a gateway to other drugs, thereby contributing to many social problems.

As one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladeshis can ill afford to divert their spending from basic needs to tobacco, and yet the poor in Bangladesh are the most likely to use tobacco. Per capita in Bangladesh, people consume far more cigarettes than eggs. As tobacco prices are kept low and advertising is allowed to continue, more and more young and poor people will become addicted to this dangerous drug, and more and more money will be diverted away from food and other essentials to tobacco.

The Government of Bangladesh is not able single-handedly to control tobacco effectively, nor should it be expected to. The main source of the problem arises not from the domestic companies, but rather from the presence of a transnational tobacco company. The main profits from the sale of tobacco are being transferred from our poor country to an exceedingly wealthy one. We believe that as the benefit of addicting people to tobacco mainly accrues to those outside of our country, so the support of other countries is needed in our efforts to control tobacco.

As elsewhere in the world, many of the issues Bangladesh faces in tobacco control are international ones. These include transmission of tobacco ads through satellite television stations originating abroad, and the huge business of smuggling cigarettes. Bangladesh alone cannot act effectively on either of these issues.

For these reasons, our organization strongly supports a comprehensive convention on tobacco control that will address transnational issues, while also giving governments guidelines and concrete goals for action on domestic issues. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) could help our nation to address transnational issues, while strengthening local efforts. International experience indicates that a set of strong policies for tobacco control would lead to sharp declines in tobacco use, with the subsequent benefits for public health as well as individual and national expenditure away from tobacco towards essential goods. Those currently employed in the tobacco industry could easily find jobs in other fields as people shifted their spending to local goods and services. In particular, women, children, and the poor would benefit the most: the poor because they are the most likely to use tobacco, and thus to suffer from its effects; women and children, because they eat last and thus suffer most when scarce household resources are diverted from food to tobacco.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from a broad spectrum of interests have come together to form the Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA), working closely with the government and the World Health Organization on tobacco control. Member and affiliate organizations of BATA will continue to work together on tobacco control, and will actively support the FCTC, both in its formation, and in national implementation after its passage. We will help to educate the press and the public about the importance of the FCTC, to monitor the behavior of tobacco companies, to support the government wherever possible, and to engage more NGOs in tobacco control.
In order for the FCTC to be a useful tool in Bangladesh, we need governments to approve a strong document that will at minimum guarantee government action on key transnational issues such as advertising and smuggling. Funding mechanisms for the wealthier countries to support the poorer ones would also increase our ability to enact the FCTC successfully here. We believe that NGOs have a key role to play in ensuring the successful enactment of the FCTC locally, and believe that the involvement of NGOs should be clearly specified and encouraged. Since much of the burden of the growing tobacco epidemic will be on poor countries in Asia, we believe that other forms of cooperation between North and South are also necessary. Finally, we believe that the FCTC represents an unprecedented opportunity for strong global action to lessen greatly the harms caused by tobacco to health, economy, and environment. With a strong convention, the needs of individuals and nations can finally be given higher priority than the “right” of tobacco companies to make a killing.