

Youth refuse to be ‘targetted’ by the tobacco industry

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By Bobby Ramakant

More than 80% of the tobacco use begins before the age of 18 years. The tobacco industry loses more than 5.4 million of its best customers every year as they die of causes attributed to tobacco use. Documents recovered from the tobacco industry reveal that the tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship campaigns are targetted to encourage young people and women to begin tobacco use.

Youth refuse to be targetted anymore by the tobacco industry, was the take-home message from the 2nd Global Youth Meet (GYM) held in the lead up to the 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH), in Mumbai, India (6-7 March 2009). The GYM 2009 is being organized by Health-Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth (HRIDAY) and Salaam Bombay Foundation.

There are more than 160 youth from 27 countries and nine Indian states who are participating in the GYM 2009.

These youth from around the world convened for two days to come up with country-specific action plans on effectively implementing the smoke-free policies and ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship in their respective countries. They also came up with a regional action plan to respond to issues that require a regional response and cannot be addressed at a country level.

All people have a fundamental right to breathe clean air. Smoke-free places are essential to protect non-smokers and also to encourage smokers to quit. That is why youth came up with action plans that they can work upon to enforce smoke-free policies when they return back to their own countries.

“Tobacco industry has been knowingly promoting a product that kills” said a presenter in the plenary session on the second day of GYM 2009. That is why the youth at GYM 2009 demanded total ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship in their countries, regions and the world. Partial bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, do not work because the industry merely redirects its resources to other non-regulated marketing channels. Only a total ban can reduce tobacco consumption and protect people, particularly youth, from industry marketing tactics. Only 5% of the world’s population currently lives in countries with comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

These young people shall also be participating in the 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) which is being convened in Mumbai, India from 8-12 March 2009. During the

WCTOH, these youth are organizing many advocacy events on issues around tobacco control like public marches in Mumbai, signature petition campaigns, and other such initiatives.

V Regunathan, who comes from Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu is committed to mobilize more than 10 million youth to sign on a petition demanding effective implementation of tobacco control policies.

Let us hope the voices of young people don't get drowned in the noise by the misleading tobacco promotion of the tobacco industry. At least the youth at the WCTOH, have refused to be the targets of the industry, anymore. The struggle continues.

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