



-For immediate publication-

Closed-Door Forum on Tobacco Control Held in Ottawa Starts Today, Key Stakeholders Groups Shut Out of Conversation

In spite of highlighting illegal tobacco in their consultation, Health Canada denies subject matter experts from participating in discussion

OTTAWA, February 28, 2017: The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco (NCACT) called on the government to make addressing contraband tobacco a priority as it looks to the future of tobacco control in Canada. Health Canada has launched national consultations on future tobacco control strategies and a national forum is being held in Ottawa this week. Unfortunately, the NCACT's request to participate was declined. This, despite Health Canada explicitly stating that "contraband tobacco may also have implications for traditional approaches to tobacco control." The main reasoning for the NCACT's eleventh hour rejection was the citing of a non-binding World Health Organization resolution that was overly interpreted by Health Canada officials.

"Contraband tobacco is a huge problem in Canada. Illegal cigarettes are cheap, easy to get, and don't adhere to Canada's tobacco regulations," said Gary Grant, a 39-year veteran of the Toronto Police Service and national spokesperson for the NCACT. "About 1 in 3 cigarettes sold in Ontario and 15% in Quebec are illegal. Increasingly, we are seeing seizures of illegal cigarettes smuggled into the Atlantic and Prairie provinces. This is a problem that is clearly not getting better and the Federal Government with its provincial and municipal partners needs to take action now in order to have an effective tobacco control strategy."

This week, Health Canada holds a closed-door discussion about tobacco control, without the only national organization whose sole purpose is stopping the booming illegal tobacco trade, a cash cow for organized crime. The RCMP estimates that there are 175 criminal gangs profiting from the sale of illicit tobacco, with 50 illegal factories operating in Canada, each able to produce as many as 10,000 cigarettes a minute. These organized crime groups use the proceeds from contraband tobacco to fund their other activities, including guns, drugs and human smuggling. And the proceeds are lucrative: The Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada identified \$100 million in suspicious financial transactions between 2006 and 2012 from one contraband hotspot alone.

"Because illegal cigarettes don't adhere to Canada's existing tobacco regulations, like price, age restrictions, and health warnings, reducing illegal cigarettes availability would increase the effectiveness of Canada's existing strict tobacco control measures and protect our children from smoking cigarettes," continued Grant. "We believe that as subject matter experts, the NCACT has an important role to play in this national discussion. I am shocked that Health Canada has elected to exclude us."

The Senate is currently considering bill S-5 which, among other things, would create the regulatory environment for the government to standardize tobacco packaging. The NCACT supports regulation that will keep cigarettes out of the hands of youth and is concerned that the government's current proposal will make it easier for criminals to disguise illegal product, making it harder to identify the difference between illegitimate and legitimate product. Anti-contraband measures should be introduced ahead of such changes to packaging regulations in order to curb any potential rise in the counterfeit tobacco market.

"We share the government's goal of reducing tobacco use in Canada. In fact, it is the NCACT's only role. Reducing contraband tobacco is the low-hanging fruit of tobacco control, and would have the additional benefit of increasing government revenues and discouraging organized crime," concluded Grant. "Provinces are

beginning to pay more attention to this problem. It's a shame that the only organization in Canada dedicated to reducing illegal tobacco won't be included in the conversation on the future of tobacco control in Canada."

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About NCACT

The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco is a Canadian advocacy group formed with the participation of businesses, organizations and individuals concerned about the growing danger of contraband cigarettes. NCACT members share the goals of working together to educate people and urge government to take quick action to stop this growing threat.

The members of the NCACT are: Association des détaillants en alimentation du Québec (ADA), Association des marchands dépanneurs et épiciers du Québec (AMDEQ), Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Convenience Stores Association (CCSA), Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers Council, Conseil du patronat du Québec (CPQ), Customs and Immigration Union, Échec au crime Québec, Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec (FCCQ), Frontier Duty Free Association (FDFA), National Convenience Stores Distributors Association (NACDA), Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Retail Council of Canada, Toronto Crime Stoppers, United Korean Commerce and Industry Association (UKCIA), and National Capital Area Crime Stoppers.

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