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### **Plain packaging: plain wrong**

*Experts condemn plain packaging for tobacco as ineffective public health policy*

**02 October 2014; West Virginia, USA:**

Tobacco experts today warned governments that the latest regulatory assault on cigarettes - plain, standardised packaging - won't cut smoking rates.

Think-tanks, leaders of tobacco businesses and science commentators instead argue that forcing tobacco to be sold in the drab packs amounted to a ban on branding and could contravene international law.

The warning came during discussions at the GTNF - the Global Tobacco Networking Forum, held this week in Virginia, USA. This global conference comes just two weeks before tobacco policy makers will gather in Moscow for COP6, the 'Convention of the Parties' of the WHO's FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control).

So far only Australia has introduced so-called 'plain packaging' for tobacco. Other countries looking at similar restrictions include Ireland and the UK.

Angela Harbutt, Director of the London-based think-tank Liberal Vision, condemned plain packaging. 'Plain packaging does not work. It does not stop people smoking. There's no evidence to back it up and why would there be? It's a fallacy. However it's clear that this measure curbs consumer choice and prohibits companies from using their own intellectual property - it is an absurd law. And it is tobacco today but what tomorrow? Everyone should be worried about the precedent this sets for other consumer goods such as alcohol, food and pharmaceutical products.'

Michiel Reerink, Head of Global Regulatory Strategy at JTI (Japan Tobacco International) added: 'In Australia, this measure didn't lead to any further decline in smoking rates, which the government promised it would. The concept of plain packaging is not based on any real science about why people smoke and for that reason, it hasn't worked and it will not work. They made up the policy and then looked for the evidence after that. Children don't smoke because of packaging, it is that simple. Regulators have to look properly at the science behind smoker behaviour and not just make it up as they go along.'

Plain packaging is helping to fan the flames of a massive black market in illegal tobacco. According to estimates, 570 billion\* illegal cigarettes were smoked last year, causing a loss to governments of \$40 billion\* on lost tax revenue and hitting legitimate businesses hard. In Australia, the black market has increased by 2.1%\*\* since plain packaging was introduced. Standardised packaging is easier to copy, and there are fears that commoditising tobacco drives smokers to the cheapest option - illegal cigarettes.

Patricia Kovacevic, Director of Regulatory Affairs at Lorillard Tobacco, said that plain packaging would only make the problem worse. 'The industry is working closely with enforcement agencies around the world to tackle this global crime. Governments looking at plain packaging need to think carefully about the impact it would have. The black market in tobacco funds serious organized crime and even terrorism. It makes cheap illegal cigarettes easily available to minors and steals money directly from the public purse. When we weigh the likelihood of a serious expansion of the black market against whatever benefit society is supposed to receive from plain packaging, it should be clear that there are other, less intrusive and more effective ways to reduce smoking.'

Australia's law is being scrutinised by the WTO (World Trade Organization) amid serious concerns raised by several countries that the regulation contravenes global trade agreements that protect intellectual property rights.

A WTO committee is reviewing the law and will announce its decision in the coming months.

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\*Source: Euromonitor International 2013

\*\*Source: "*Illicit tobacco in Australia*", KPMG, 3 April 2014

### **About the Global Tobacco Networking Forum**

The Global Tobacco Networking Forum (GTNF) is the world's premier venue for interaction among tobacco and e-cigarettes industry representatives and engagement with stakeholders. It brings together industry members, media, commentators, and representatives of NGOs and the finance sector for two days of presentation, discussion and networking. The GTNF debuted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2008 and has subsequently been held in Bangalore, India (2010), Antwerp, Belgium (2012) and Cape Town, South Africa (2013). This year it will take place in West Virginia, USA. The GTNF is organised and hosted by Tobacco Reporter magazine and funded by sponsorship from numerous companies in the sector. For more information, visit: [www.gtnf-2014.com](http://www.gtnf-2014.com)