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Press Release

City of Dortmund Promotes the Sale of Tobacco

The world's biggest trade fair for tobacco goods and smokers' requirements, the Inter-tabac, is scheduled to be held in the city of Dortmund, Germany, from September 20th to 22nd. The trade fair is organized by the Westfalenhallen Dortmund GmbH, a company completely owned by the city of Dortmund. The city-owned company is not merely managing the trade fair but organizes it completely, maintains a tight-woven net of relationships to the exhibiting companies, offers a stage for tobacco-related presentations and advertises the "world's biggest marketplace for the tobacco branch" on the internet.

Johannes Spatz, spokesman of Forum Rauchfrei, severely criticizes the city of Dortmund. The fact, that the city increases the sales of tobacco products by arranging the specialist trade fair inter-tabac is outrageous, he says, the city's task was to restrict the possibilities for trading tobacco instead. Although the consequences of smoking were known all too well the city was baldly promoting tobacco products, making the tobacco industry its partner. Spatz holds the mayor personally responsible. The role of a tobacco baron would not fit a municipal leader.

In the run up to the trade fair the city had exercised its influence on the federate state government, which holds a position rather friendly to the protection of non-smokers, to fulfill the tobacco industry's wish for a temporary suspension of the law on the protection of non-smokers. The federate state government subsequently granted an exceptional permission.

Forum Rauchfrei has turned to the Ministry of Health in North Rhine-Westphalia as well as to Dortmund's mayor and protested against the trade fair's being carried through. "The city gives priority to economic advantages over the protection of the population." Furthermore the city's actions are in strong contradiction to the law on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which passed the German Bundestag in 2004. The law's guidelines, which representatives of the German government had been co-working on, request government agencies to minimize their contact to the tobacco industry as far as possible. Spatz "As the city is tempted by money all regulations are turned upside down and laws are suspended in Dortmund."

An offshoot of the tobacco trade fair in Dortmund, the Inter-tabac Asia, was held in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, in 2012 and 2013. Upon request by Forum Rauchfrei the German embassy in Manila stated, that it participated in the opening events, "however by merely attending – not by giving speeches." In its further statements the embassy distances itself from the Inter-tabac Asia as well. "The German embassy in Manila did not participate in the arrangement or realization of the trade fairs Inter-tabac 2012 or Inter-tabac 2013." Furthermore the embassy clearly stated: "The arrangement or realization of the trade fairs was supported neither financially nor in any other form by the embassy in Manila, if there has been any support by the German State in any other form, we are unable to say. However that may be, we do NOT recommend the trade fair for consideration by the Association for the German Trade Fair Industry." More than 2,000 demonstrators protested against the Inter-tabac 2012 in Manila.

The next Inter-tabac Asia is scheduled for February 27th and 28th 2014 in Bali, Indonesia. The Inter-tabac Asia is enthusiastic about the Asian market: "Indonesia has the highest tobacco consumption per capita in the whole of Asia. Not surprisingly, for rising incomes enable more and more people to consume international tobacco products and services. There is hardly a better place to expand and to consolidate one's business activities in the Asiatic region." Indonesia is among the countries with the highest rates of male smokers worldwide (67 %). More than 20 million children in the country smoke.

Spatz especially condemns the bearing of the Westfalenhallen Dortmund GmbH's chairman of the supervisory board, Friedhelm Sohn (Social Democratic Party), who is simultaneously chairman of the city's committee for children, youth and family issues. "How is Mr. Sohn to protect children from smoking while simultaneously furthering the tobacco trade?" In Spatz's view Mr. Sohn has lost any trustworthiness when it comes to protecting children.

Spatz demands that Mayor Sierau puts a stop to the Inter-tabac in Dortmund as well as in Indonesia. Forum Rauchfrei has announced a protest rally in front of the fair halls for September 21st.