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Health professionals reject tobacco fair

BY NI KOMANG ERVIANI ON 2014-01-25

Public health professionals and leaders from several countries, including Indonesia, issued a call on Friday to stop the plan to hold Inter-tabac ASIA 2014, an international trade fair for tobacco products and smoking accessories, run by German-based company Westfalahallen Dortmund GmbH. Those against the plan signed a petition requesting that the Indonesian government and the governor of Bali prohibit the fair.

“We respectfully request the government of the republic of Indonesia and the provincial government of Bali to prohibit Inter-tabac Asia from being held from February 27-28 in Bali, and to prohibit the Germany-based Inter-tabac from promoting tobacco products in Indonesia,” states in the petition, which was signed by health professionals from Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Timor Leste, the US and Vietnam. The petition was made on the sidelines of an international seminar on public health that was held in Kuta.

Putu Ayu Swandewi Astuti, head of the school of public health at Udayana University, said that the petition would be sent to Bali Governor Made Mangku Pastika, and other related parties, to prohibit the fair in Bali or other regions of Indonesia.

“Besides sending the petition to related parties who have authority to prohibit the fair, we will also take many other actions to boost support from Balinese people, including conducting a peace rally. The trade fair should not be held in Bali or any other region of Indonesia, as it is not in line with our fight against tobacco,” Swandewi said.

Bali Tobacco Control Initiative coordinator, Made Kerta Duana, said that the tobacco trade fair was against many regulations in Indonesia, as well as in Bali. “The tobacco trade fair is obviously against the law,” Kerta Duana said.

Article 1 of Government Regulation No. 109/2012 obliges the government to ban the consumption, sale, advertising and/or promotion of tobacco products in public places. Article 13 of the provincial bylaw on smoke-free zones No. 10/2011 also bans the consumption, sale, advertising and promotion of tobacco products in public places, workplaces and other places. The same regulation was also stated in Article 15 of the Bandung Regency bylaw on smoke-free zones No. 8/2013.

Partha Muliawan, from Bali’s Public Health Scholars Association (IAKMI), said the plan to hold the tobacco fair is a challenge for Bali, following its success on enforcing the bylaw on smoke-free zones. “This is a new challenge for us in Bali, after we were hardly encouraged by the government to enforce our bylaw on smoke-free zones. We will continue with this movement until the German-based company cancels their plan,” Partha said.

Since it was enacted in 2011, the attempt to enforce the provincial bylaw on smoke-free zones has progressed well, with many people now aware of the bylaw. Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) officers have conducted a series of inspections at government offices, hotels, restaurants, hospitals and many other places, in order to enforce the bylaw. Many people have also been sanctioned for violations.

International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD) country lead, Tara Singh Bam, declared his support to the movement rejecting the fair. “As you know, tobacco is a killer. The German-based tobacco company is coming here to kill Indonesians. They want to promote their products and kill Indonesia,” Singh Bam said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco causes six million deaths every year worldwide, most of them in low- and middle-income countries, including 200,000 people from Indonesia.

“Through the trade fair, they [Westfalenhallen Dortmund GmbH] want to spread disease to Indonesian people, including cancer and heart disease. We must stop this event,” Singh Bam emphasized.

He also mentioned that tobacco companies are targeting Indonesia because the country has yet to ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

“Why are they not going to other countries? Because Indonesia is a tobacco-friendly market. They said this on their website. They have shamed Indonesia at the global level. The Indonesian government must stop it and prevent tobacco product promotion in Indonesia,” he said.

Director of the Cambodian Ministry of Health’s National Center for Health Promotion, Khun Sokrin, also conveyed his support. “I will always strongly [support] you in fighting against tobacco in the very long term, including stopping the trade fair,” he said.

“Inter-tabac ASIA is a threat. The threat is real. The threat is serious. Inter-tabac ASIA should be prohibited in Indonesia, now and in the future,” Thomas Stuebner, director of the IUATLD’s International Management Development Programme, added.