

Netizens want German firm to call off tobacco fair in Bali

Nurfika Osman, The Jakarta Post | National | Fri, January 24 2014, 8:05 AM

An online petition has been launched to pressure German-based company Westfalahallen Dortmund GmbH into canceling its upcoming international trade fair for tobacco products and smoking accessories, Inter-tabac ASIA 2014, in Bali.

A petition on change.org, an online campaign platform, has collected up to 11,000 signatures worldwide as of today, mostly from Indonesia and Germany.

The petition will be sent directly to Westfalahallen Dortmund GmbH company chairman Friedhelm Sohn and the mayor of Dortmund, Ullrich Sierau, on Jan. 28 by the petition's initiator, Yosef Rabindanata Nugraha.

More people are expected to sign the petition before next month. "Inter-tabac ASIA will not only create more access to Indonesia for local and international tobacco industry players but will also make our country a primary target for this dangerous product. They are doing this because 90 percent of countries across the globe have closed their doors to tobacco," Yosef said in Jakarta on Wednesday.

Yosef, who is also the founder of the Indonesia Bebas Rokok (Indonesia Free from Cigarettes) movement, started the petition on Dec. 1 last year with a Dortmund counterpart Max Vollmer, who is the head of Deutscher Jugendschutz-Verband (German Association for Youth Protection).

Bali is set to host the trade fair from Feb. 27 to 28.

Yosef said that he was disappointed with both the central and Bali provincial governments, as they had not done anything to stop the company bringing a huge tobacco event to the country. "It seems that the government is letting the industry reduce the quality of life of Indonesia's next generations, because they will be sick generations due to cigarette smoking," he added.

He hoped that the petition could also pressure the government into not letting any other Indonesian cities host Inter-tabac ASIA or similar events in the future.

In line with his counterpart, Vollmer said that the event would help tobacco players sell cigarettes to children.

"We need to stop Inter-tabac because it will turn Indonesia and other Asian countries into the company's markets. Besides, they can sell their products with no limits, including to

children,” Vollmer said.

Johannes Spatz, a spokesman from Forum Rauchfrei, a German association that campaigns for anti-smoking action, also showed his support.

He said that the forum would do anything to help Yosef and Vollmer stop the event because tobacco advertising and promotion have caused more than 40 percent of Indonesian male children to smoke.

In addition, similar support was shown by Kartono Mohamad, the chairman of the Indonesia Tobacco Control Network.

“The government has lost its sense of nationalism because it is welcoming a foreign company, which uses and destroys Indonesian people in order to get more money,” Kartono said.

Change.org Indonesia cofounder Arief Aziz said that this was the website’s first transnational petition.

Arief said that the petition proved that people were concerned about youth health issues, despite differences between Indonesia and Germany.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Indonesia has one of the highest populations of smokers among developing countries.

Health Ministry records show there are 61.4 million smokers in Indonesia, 60 percent of whom are male.

Last year, the ministry’s data said that 260,000 people died from smoking-related illnesses.