CISLAC commends FG on new tobacco tax regime

The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) commends the much awaited development in the nation’s tax regime with the recently approved amendment by President Muhammadu Buhari to the excise duty rates with tobacco constituting a major priority.

While we applaud the giant stride by the Federal Government, seeing it as one amongst many measures to discourage consumption of tobacco products and mitigate the devastating impacts—health, social and economic of tobacco use on the citizens and its growing burdens on limited and already overstretched public resources, we are not unaware of tactics of the Tobacco Industry globally who in their known fashion try to subvert such efforts by national governments.

We are delighted that the development is not only in line with the Government’s commitment to safe and secure the lives of Nigerians but also the overarching recommendations made by the Tobacco Taxation Working Group as well as those of the Tariff Technical Committee (TCC) which are all in consonance with reports of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund Technical Assistance Mission on Nigeria’s Fiscal Policy.

We find it worthy of a note that the upward review of excise duty rates for tobacco is also in consonance with various provisions and recommendations by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standards of health.

While commending this move, we also call on the government to ensure that the minimal increase in greeted with sustained and systematic increases of taxes and the introduction of other price measures on tobacco products to put us at par with other African countries such as the Gambia, and South Africa who have results to show for the benefits of tobacco taxes.

As the realization that tobacco use and consumption not only impacts negatively on the overall public health of countries with the global Tobacco Control community advancing advocacy to isolate the Tobacco Industry, available empiric data and information on the efficacy of tax and price measures for Tobacco Control becomes a definite plausible way to go in the country in contributing to protecting the lives of all Nigerians.

We are convinced that the development in addition to firstly contributing to the protection of the nation’s overall public health interests and a reduction in the health hazards associated with tobacco-related diseases will also enhance the Government’s fiscal revenues just as we sustain recorded gains on tobacco control in the country.
Considering other outstanding recommendations that are as well paramount to the implementation of the National Tobacco Control Act 2015, we reiterate the need to fast track the process to ratify Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products and adopt a tracking system in order to enhance revenue collection efficiency by preventing leakages and smuggling of tobacco products.

As the first meeting of the parties to the above mentioned Protocol has been scheduled to take place come July 2018, we fear that if Nigeria misses out of ratifying the protocol by June 2018, the country stands the risk of missing out of the maiden and all future meetings of parties to the protocol until ratifying same.

Such a trend will definitely serve as a clog in the wheel of successes recorded in Tobacco Control in Nigeria as the country as a major player in politics and economy on the continent cannot and must not be left out at such a fora which will then be dominated by countries outside of the African continent who have ratified the protocol.

We use this medium to call on all relevant government agencies including the Federal Ministry of Health, Federal Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to expedite action of the ratification process to enable the country participate at this all important meeting.

We also urge the government to as a matter of urgency operationalize the Tobacco Control Fund in line with Section 8 of the National Tobacco Control Act 2015 in order to fulfil the objectives of the NTC Act, aid the activities of the Tobacco Control Unit (TCU) and National Tobacco Control Committee (NATOCC).

Signed:

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