

Statement

By
Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

At

*Award-Giving Ceremony of the Director-General's Special
Award to Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, Minister of Health and
Family Welfare, Government of India*

New Delhi, India
20 July 2007

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Your Excellency, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Shri Naresh Dayal, Secretary; Distinguished guests; Ladies and gentlemen;

It is a unique privilege and a great honour for me on this auspicious occasion to felicitate His Excellency Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, for receiving the Special Award of the Director-General of WHO for tobacco control. Under his dynamic leadership, the tobacco control programme in India has witnessed rapid strides with the enforcement of "The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003".

Tobacco was introduced in India by the colonial powers in the 15th century. India today is the third-largest producer of tobacco leaf after China and Brazil. Annually, India also produces 95 billion sticks of cigarettes and 850 billion sticks of *bidis*. In addition, India produces millions of pouches of chewing *Paan Masala* (betel quid) with tobacco. As we all know, tobacco use has a devastating impact on the health of people all over the world. Therefore, tobacco control is a must in any country. Successive leaders of India have introduced necessary legislative measures for tobacco control since the early 1970s. These measures culminated in the enactment of the Cigarettes Act of 1975. A series of state-level measures were also introduced in the late 1990s for tobacco control. In

addition, a number of directives were given by the Central Government as well as the Apex Court restricting tobacco-related advertisements, and banning smoking in public places.

After putting in place a comprehensive legislation for tobacco control in 2003, India played a significant role in the negotiation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). It was among the first 40 Member States to ratify the Framework Convention in February 2004. This shows the deep commitment on the part of the Government of India to tobacco control. The Honourable Minister, Dr Ramadoss, has efficiently and effectively steered the process of implementing the related rules and regulations, especially those relating to the ban on tobacco-smoking in public places and tobacco-related advertisements, and restricting the access of youth to tobacco products. In a bold and courageous initiative, the Honourable Minister proposed a ban on the depiction of scenes of tobacco consumption, or any kind of promotion of tobacco products, in movies and on television.

In recognition of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's exemplary leadership and contributions to tobacco control, the American Cancer Society awarded it the prestigious Luther L. Terry Award, at the 13th World Conference on Tobacco or Health held in Washington, DC, USA in 2006.

While accepting the said award, the Honourable Minister, Dr Ramadoss, told the cheering gathering that that was perhaps the first of a series of awards that India and its people deserved for their commitment to tobacco control. Receiving the Special Award of the Director-General of WHO is a fitting and natural recognition of the commitment, dedication, unrelenting efforts and visionary leadership of His Excellency, Dr Ramadoss, in advancing the tobacco control agenda in India. The efforts and leadership of His Excellency, Dr Ramadoss, to ban scenes of smoking in films and on television will have a global impact, since Indian films and television serials command a worldwide viewership. The introduction by India of graphic warning labels on *bidis* and smokeless tobacco products also serves as a unique example for other the countries in the Region.

The tobacco control measures initiated and implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under the stewardship of His Excellency, Dr Ramadoss, have been widely acclaimed at the regional and global levels. The World Health Organization deems it an honour to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of the Honourable Minister, Dr Ramadoss, to safeguard the future generations from the devastating consequences of tobacco use. We, in WHO, are confident that under the able leadership and far-sighted vision of His Excellency, Dr Ramadoss, the efforts for tobacco control in India will continue to gain momentum and strengthen the ongoing efforts in this regard.

As Regional Director of the WHO South-East Asia Region and on behalf of the WHO Director-General, I am delighted to honour His Excellency, Dr Ambumani Ramadoss with a global award and a regional plaque in deep appreciation of his exceptionally commendable efforts.

I thank you all for your attention.