

The Argentine Society of Cardiology For a childhood and a youth free of tobacco

"We can undertake the most ambitious researches, have the best specialists, the best hospitals and the best medical teams, but if we do not create and implement a policy against tobacco consumption, we will be building a house with no foundations".

Dr. TABARÉ VÁZQUEZ, PRESIDENT OF URUGUAY

On May 30th, 2008 the "Agreement of Commitment for a Childhood and a Youth Free of Tobacco", under the convened of the then Nation Minister of Health, Ms Maria Graciela Ocaña, and with the support of 60 national and international institutions among which was the Argentine Society of Cardiology, was signed.(1)

The signatories of the agreement committed themselves to fulfil the following duties:

- To establish a national alliance for a childhood and youth free of tobacco smoke, in order to stimulate children and youth grow and develop in an environment free of smoke and tobacco advertising.
- To protect children and youth of the environmental conditions that stimulates consumption and tobacco addiction.
- To adopt decisions that make easier the implementation of policies and actions to prevent the onset in consumption in youth and decrease the exposure to tobacco smoke in closed spaces.
- To promote mechanisms of participation and social surveillance in local, regional and national levels for the development of networks for the prevention of consumption in youth.
- To register and spread the best practices, initiatives and experiences for consumption prevention, and for the implementation of spaces 100% free of tobacco.
- To educate, inform and sensitize about tobacco consumption and its health implications, to children and youth, families and the society through preventive campaigns.
- To guarantee that all the events and public celebrations made by the signatories entities would be declared free of tobacco smoke. (2)

In those basic aspects, nothing has changed. Consumption by youth is rather high. The prevalence of tobacco consumption in adolescents between 13 and 15 years reaches 32.8%, meanwhile 12% of children of 9 to 11 years have already initiated in cigarettes consumption and 2 out of 10 smokers started before the age of 15. (3) The problem of selling cigarettes to minors in kiosks is an insoluble problem; tobacco advertising is next to sweets. Tobacco companies seek to earn money and this implies selling more cigarettes. Companies argued that invoicing more does not mean selling more cigarettes.

The equation would be increasing the price through quality offering a value proposal with brands, selected tobacco, filters, better packages, so clients pay more for them and authorities allow increasing prices without increasing taxes. Tobacco companies made an agreement on collection to move from \$5,000 million to \$6,300 and to \$7,600 million, more than \$1,000 million per year (currency in Argentine), and if they do not comply, government would increase taxes. (4) Companies need to create a strategy to maintain a number of consumers. They know that the business is controversial because it affects health, and while admitting that consumption is declining in the world, last year decreased only 2% (others believe that cigarettes selling did not decrease). Finally, they boast of lobbying in the Legislature in order to protect the regional economy of seven tobacco-producing provinces.

FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLLS?

Tobacco is the main cause of avoidable morbidity and mortality in Argentine and in the world. Its consumption causes respiratory, cardiovascular and cancer diseases. In Argentine, 27.1% of the adult population smokes (5) and more than 40,000 annual deaths are produced due to diseases related to tobacco what is equivalent to 110 deaths per day or 4.6 deaths per hour. From all the deaths due to smoking, 6,000 correspond to passive smokers by indirect exposure. The Medical Care System spends 6,900 millions per year (16% of the total health spending) to treat those emerging diseases of tobacco consumption, without taking into account economical losses due to disability and the labor productivity loss, against \$4,200 millions (currency in circulation in Argentine) that are collected by taxes on tobacco production. (6)

In Latin America 600,000 persons per year die due to this cause, that is to say, 1,644 per day. Across America, the number of deaths stands at 1,100,000 per year or 3,014 per day. Worldwide is calculated in 5 millions of deaths per year, that is to say, 13,700 per day.

In Argentine, tobacco epidemic affects more than 8 million of persons; half of them would suffer predictable consequences of mortality due to this cause in case they do not abandon the addiction. Consumption declines in

those developed countries, meanwhile in those countries in process of development increases. In developed countries population is more aware of the harmful effects that smoking causes to health. Government in those countries created anti-tobacco campaigns, advertising banning, and the increase of taxes.

The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the first global public health treaty approved in 2003 and entered into force in 2005.

Argentina signed the Convention in 2003, but is the only country in South America, and one of the few in the world, that has not ratified it. Since the date of the signature, more than 160,000 persons have died due to diseases related to tobacco.

The Convention was developed in response to the concern generated through the global spread of tobacco epidemic. Its main objective, according to Article 3, is to "protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke by providing a providing a framework for tobacco control measures to be implemented by the Parties at the national, regional and international levels in order to reduce continually and substantially the prevalence of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke".

The Convention involves a global strategy to combat tobacco epidemic. It enables the creation of health policies that countries cannot carry out due to the strong economical power of tobacco industries.

The Convention includes tobacco control as the implementation of policies designed to reduce the supply, the demand and damages caused by tobacco. The measures of greater impact are 6, which are summarised in the acronym M-POWER:

- M Monitoring tobacco problem and evaluation of the policies destined to decrease and prevent consumption.
- P Protection of the exposure to second-hand smoke by the implementation of smoke-free environments in all closed, public and private places.
- O Offering help to quit smoking
- W Warning about the damages caused by tobacco consumption. Inclusion of images in packages.
- E Enforcing complete banning of advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of tobacco products.
- R Raising cigarettes price and tobacco taxes.

If these M-POWER six measures were simultaneously implemented worldwide, global tobacco consumption would drop from 23% to 14% and 150 millions of lives would be saved in the century. There is no other measure of public health having this health and economic impact.

To date, more than 160 countries ratified the Convention in their parliaments becoming parties, which involves obligation and commitment to adopt and implement the measures established in the Convention. Argentina did not sign and deaths related to tobacco consumption are in the same intensity.

The Argentine Society of Cardiology, member of the South American Society of Cardiology, signed Montevideo Declaration: "For a South America free of tobacco smoke", in the recent Cardiosur 2010 congress together with all the Societies of the region. In such declaration all rulers of ratified countries of the Convention are invited to implement the strategies and support Argentine's efforts to ratify it. (7)

Argentine cardiology should help in this fight for our patients' lives and for new generations in order to have a better quality of life, with better health and free of smoke. We can continue holding: "Thanks for not smoking and avoiding others to do it". The Argentine Society of Cardiology would honor the agreements signed. And we will comply with the words of Eladia Blázquez, to honor the life.

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