

IRIB's Testimony
Submitted to
The WHO Public Hearings on FCTC
Geneva, 12-13 October 2000

In The Name of God The Compassionate The Merciful

It gives me much pleasure to take part in these public hearings on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting to submit IRIB's testimony and comments on the FCTC. The WHO Public Hearings have provided an international opportunity for representatives from the four quarters of the globe to share their testimonies over one of the most serious and pressing issues of modern times. I should also like to express my gratitude to WHO for its role in organizing this magnificent meeting.

Let me first very briefly introduce IRIB to you. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is an independent organization in Iran that presents its radio and TV programs in different languages (e.g., Farsi, Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and German, etc.) and has put many Asian, African and also European and American countries under its program coverage. IRIB has more than 13,000 employees and is the exclusive radio and television organization in Iran, which has more than 40 radio and 18 TV (provincial, national & international) channels.

For the past few years, IRIB has made several attempts to reduce the consumption of tobacco by means of the application of a two-tiered policy of education and publicity. This exercise has assisted us in designing better policies and devising more comprehensive and effective principles for carrying out the main objective of the project for tobacco control. The following are examples of such policies and principles:

- Explaining to the public the close relation between tobacco consumption and a large variety of social harms, which effect the individual, the family and the whole society.
- Paying attention to the audiences' views, attitudes, tastes and various aspects of their psychological and social needs.
- Introducing coherent and consistent sets of novel, moral and spiritual ideas and ideals to the public in order to equip them with constructive intellectual frameworks.

Making use of the above principles and policies, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), through its several Radio & TV channels has carried out many projects & produced & broadcast a large number of programs which are directly or indirectly related to the anti-tobacco campaign.

According to the official statistics, 9 m out the present 64m people of Iran are tobacco consumers. 85% of the smokers are youth aged between 15 and 25. Taking into account the fact that the population of the country has doubled during the past 20 years, and that more than 50% of the population is under 25 years of age, the immensity of the danger, which is threatening Iran's human resources, will become more evident.

From a purely economic point of view, Iranians pay more than 2 b tommans per day for smoking, while tobacco consumption costs the country around 4 b tommans per day, in terms of the medical services required to assist the victims of this nasty habit. The total tobacco-related cost in our country therefore comes to 2,000 b tommans per year, which is more than enough to build a city for a population of 700,000 with all the required infrastructure and facilities.

From the safety point of view, in Tehran more than 9,000 cases of smoking-related fires have been recorded annually. The statistics around the country provide an even more disturbing reading. According to the official statistics, many cases of fire in forest areas are due to careless smokers. If we add air pollution to the list of hazards caused by tobacco consumption, the ecological impact of this phenomenon becomes more evident.

From the point of view of health matters, according to the statistics published by the Iranian Ministry of Health, tobacco related illnesses kill one person every 10 minutes in Iran. And it has been predicted that the death rate will rise to one person every 2.5 minutes in 20 years time. So it seems that the slogan “ Tobacco Kills - Don’t be Duped “ is a reality.

In this context it is also important to pay attention to the undesired and appalling social consequences of tobacco consumption in Iran. According to many studies carried out during the past few years, cigarette addiction is the first step towards all sorts of social crimes and delinquencies. Many of the young criminals who have been interviewed by social workers have emphasized that cigarette addiction has played a major role in pushing them toward a life of crime and anti-social behavior.

At this stage of the testimony it seems appropriate to point to a major source of danger and threat to Iran in relation to the issue of tobacco control. The source of danger is smuggling. Taking into consideration that Iran ranks 16th in size among the countries of the world and is about one-fifth the size of the continental United States; also considering its long borders and the closeness of the eastern borders of the country to one of the most important centers of traffickers in the world; show clearly how threatening smuggling is to Iran. Although the transnational tobacco companies legally have no hand in the tobacco market of Iran and any pro-tobacco ads are totally banned within the country, the smuggled products have covered more than 50% of consumption.

Putting the above-mentioned issues all together, draws a wide spectrum of serious problems that Iran is facing today, from health issue to socio-economic challenges, from environmental hazards to criminal activities of smuggling and trafficking. In this regard some important questions arise:

- ◆ Is it possible for Iran or any other country to fight singlehandedly against such a problem that cuts across national boundaries and has become a world scourge?
- ◆ How can national public health policies of a country be advanced without the risk of being undone by transnational phenomena like smuggling?
- ◆ How can any single State obligate the others to cooperate in the above key areas?

♦ Without an international commitment and cooperation, while the tobacco menace is a silent epidemic worldwide, how could any State take appropriate measures individually to fulfil the common objectives such as:

- fighting against smuggling,
- protecting children and adolescents from exposure to and use of tobacco,
- preventing and treating tobacco dependence,
- promoting smoke-free environments,
- promoting healthy tobacco-free economies, especially stopping smuggling?

We all, as a part of the world community, need to enhance the capacity of our States in tobacco control; need to improve knowledge and exchange of information at national and international levels; need to raise awareness among our policy-makers; need to strengthen national and international legislation and action.

This unique and massive public health impact of tobacco worldwide needs to be addressed with a comprehensive response. This global challenge comes in seeking a global solution and that solution should be a public health movement.

We strongly believe that Framework Convention on Tobacco Control could be the exact comprehensive solution that provides a reliable and powerful infrastructure for a healthy future, a future free of smoke.

Mohammad Masoud Aboutalebi

Adviser to the President of IRIB