



THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Botswana signs international protocol to eliminate illicit cigarette trade

The Tobacco Institute of Southern Africa (TISA) is greatly encouraged to learn of the recent signing, by the Botswana Ministry of Health, of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control's (FCTC) Anti-Illicit Trade Protocol. Botswana officially signed the Protocol on 1 October 2013, making it the second country in Southern Africa to do so, after South Africa who signed on 10 January 2013. TISA believes that the recommendations on licensing, due diligence, and offences will make it more difficult for unscrupulous players to continue dealing illicitly in tobacco products.

According to Francois van der Merwe, CEO of TISA, the illegal trade in cigarettes has become a serious concern across Southern Africa, not only for the legitimate tobacco industry but for law enforcement officials and government. "The problem of illicit cigarettes forms part of a broader illicit economy problem that includes amongst other goods, motor vehicles, clothing and textiles, as well as movies and music. In Botswana, there has been an influx of illicit cigarettes from Zimbabwe due to both porous borders and significant price discrepancies between legal cigarettes and the illegal ones," says Van der Merwe.

TISA's focus is on supporting law enforcement authorities in their fight against the illegal trade in cigarettes, which is currently the single biggest threat facing the sustainability of the legal tobacco industry throughout Southern Africa. "The illegal trade in tobacco products defrauds Governments of much needed revenue; it erodes volumes of legal companies; it more often than not undermines the health agenda of Governments and it also supports organised crime," adds Van der Merwe. "Those adult consumers, who choose to use tobacco products, should ensure they buy products that comply with all relevant legislation".

Reflecting the concern of the growing nature of the illegal cigarette trade in Botswana, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was concluded between TISA and the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS)

on 12 March 2012. The MoU seeks to align the efforts of industry and government to facilitate the sharing of information, within a legitimate framework amongst parties in an effort to curb the tide of illegal trading in cigarettes. Similar MoUs have been concluded with the governments of Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland.

“TISA firmly believes in a collaborative approach in combating illicit trade not only in Botswana, but across the Southern African region. We strongly encourage other Southern African states who are signatories to the FCTC to sign the Protocol and to begin implementing measures to truly eliminate the illegal trade in cigarettes across the region. The Protocol will go a long way in bringing together impacted stakeholders and we remain committed to working with all the relevant stakeholders in eliminating the illegal trade in tobacco products,” states Van der Merwe.

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