

Eurocare Press Release

Eurocare open letter of support for Thai health warning labels

Brussels, 29th October 2010

Eurocare (European Alcohol Policy Alliance) has issued today an open letter of support for the Thai government for its plans to introduce alcohol health warnings labels on packages of alcoholic beverages.

In January this year Thailand has notified the WTO (Committee on Technical Barrier to Trade) about plans to introduce rotating pictorial warnings on alcoholic beverages contained in different types of containers. The proposal includes:

- picture printed in 4 colours and 6 types of which one of them is required to be rotated at 1,000 package intervals.
- 6 types of health warning messages
- they should cover at least 30% of package
- prohibition of suggesting on labels that alcohol can improve better health

In the open letter Eurocare expressed its support for the initiative of placing health warning labels on alcoholic beverages and congratulated the Thai government for its courage and willingness to take this step to tackle alcohol related harm.

The significance of the economic costs of ill health has been acknowledged not only by public health community but also economic agencies such as the World Economic Forum in its publication “Global Risks 2010”. Chronic diseases *were placed* as one of the top most severe risks facing the world. They scored very high on likelihood and severity indicators¹. Alcohol is the 3rd main contributory factor globally to chronic diseases (it ranks 2nd in middle income countries and 1st in high income countries)².

Eurocare considers that informing consumers on every occasion when they drink about alcohol related harm will not only allow people to make an informed choice, but also encourage taking a healthier choice. Health warning labels on packages serves this purpose.

The majority of the EU citizens (79%) support health messages on bottles³.

Mariann Skar- Eurocare Secretary General said: *We hope that this initiative will lead other public health authorities to consider changes in labelling requirements for*

¹ World Economic Forum (2010) *Global risks 2010*. Geneva, Retrieved from: <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/globalrisk/Reports/index.htm>

² World Health Organization (2009). *Global health risks*. Geneva

³ Eurobarometer 72.3 (April 2010) Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/health/alcohol/docs/ebs_331_en.pdf

alcoholic beverages. However, if there is not the political power and courage to require alcohol producers to inform about side effects of alcohol consumption in their own countries, they should at least allow Thai people to decide for themselves.

In Europe we are far behind and heading in the wrong direction in terms of information provided on alcoholic beverages, the currently discussed Provision of Food Information to Consumers' directive⁴ even excludes alcohol from obligation to list ingredients. Consequently, this means that in Europe one will know what is in a bottle of fruit juice but not in a bottle of alcoholic beverage. Europe has really a long road ahead and we hope it will at least not disturb Thailand on the path it has taken.

Notes to editors:

Thailand ranks fifth worldwide in alcohol consumption⁵, with the drinking levels rapidly increasing. Annual per capita consumption in 1989 was 20.2 liters, by 2003 per capita consumption had risen to 58.0 liters⁶

EUROCARE (The European Alcohol Policy Alliance) is an alliance of organizations working on the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in research and advocacy, as well as in the provision of counselling services and residential support for problem drinkers, the provision of workplace and school based programmes and the provision of information to the public.

Eurocare advocates the prevention of alcohol related harm in Europe through effective evidence based alcohol policy.

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⁴ As retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/proposed_legislation_en.htm

⁵ United Nation's Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO)

⁶ Thai Health Promotion Foundation as retrieved from: <http://en.thaihealth.or.th/plans/alcohol>