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Tobacco Forces Still Strong

This is the VOA Special English HEALTH REPORT.

This month, the Australian High Court ruled in support of a law that bars tobacco companies from putting their logos or colors on cigarette packages. The European Union is considering a similar ban. But a recent international study showed that some countries do little to control tobacco use. It found that the tobacco industry still has a strong influence on tobacco use around the world.

Study organizers examined information about three billion tobacco users worldwide. They looked closely at tobacco use in fourteen low- and middle-income countries. They compared this information with tobacco use in two developed countries – the United States and Britain.

Gary Giovino is with the University of Buffalo School of Public Health and Professions in New York State. He also was the lead researcher in the study.

GARY GIOVINO: "Tobacco contributes an enormous burden to the health care system in developed countries, and that scenario will play out in the not-too-distant future in low- and middle-income countries. It already has in many countries -- in India, for example."

The study found that China has three hundred million tobacco users -- more than any other country. India was second, with almost two hundred seventy-five million tobacco users. Dr. Giovino says the researchers found powerful pro-tobacco forces were active even in elementary schools.

GARY GIOVINO: "The China National Tobacco Company has supported elementary schools in China – dozens and dozens of them. And they use their support to promote propaganda about tobacco use, and they are basically telling students that genius comes from hard work and tobacco helps them to be successful. That to me is mind-boggling, that a government would tell its children to use tobacco to be successful when tobacco will addict them and shorten their lives."

The study showed that governments and social traditions in many countries are open to influence from pro-tobacco forces. So the Australian court decision is considered important in supporting those fighting to control tobacco use.

Jonathan Lieberman directs the McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer in Australia.

JONATHAN LIEBERMAN: "It shows to everybody that the only way to deal with the tobacco industry's claims, sabre rattling, legal threats, is to stare them down in court. It's a fantastic decision for public health in Australia and globally."

The study found that, unless urgent action is taken, about a billion people will die early in this century as a result of tobacco use. On average, each of them will lose fifteen years of life.

And that's the VOA Special English HEALTH REPORT. You can find a link to the tobacco study – and a video of Dr. Giovino explaining it – on our website, voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.

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