

19% of Brazilians Over 15 Still Hooked on Cigarettes

Contributed by Cristina Índio do Brasil
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The number of smokers has been going down in Brazil, but the habit is still considered a public health problem in the country. In 1989, according to data from the National Cancer Institute (Inca), smokers constituted 32% percent of the population over 15 years old, a total of 30 million people. Last year this figure amounted to 23 million people, or 18.8% of the 15+ population.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), smoking is responsible for five million deaths annually around the world: 500 thousand in Latin America and 200 thousand in Brazil.

The Director of the Inca, José Gomes Temporão, recalled that, although Brazil has made great progress in recent years in the implementation of effective measures to combat smoking, the country needs to ratify as soon as possible the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, drafted in 1999 during the 52th Assembly of the WHO.

The Convention has already been approved by the Chamber of Deputies but, according to Temporão, faces obstacles in the Senate.

He said that, due to pressure from the tobacco industry, the proceedings have lost their urgency on the voting agenda.

The Inca Director informed that an effort is being made to raise awareness among Senators, and he hopes that the Convention will be ratified by the end of the year.

"Our policy is a policy of results, and it is consistent. Only one step is missing. That step, which is very important, is Senate ratification of the Convention," he said.

Temporão affirmed that it is important for Brazil to be among the first 40 countries to ratify the Convention in order to be eligible for funds that will help in the country's campaigns to combat smoking and shift to alternative crops.

The Director of the WHO's Tobacco-Free Initiative, Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva, informed that, so far, of the 168 countries that signed the treaty, 32 have already ratified it, and only 8 more are needed for it to go into effect.

In this respect, according to the Director, Uruguay, which has already ratified the treaty, is the most advanced country in the Mercosur.

Costa e Silva affirmed that representatives of the Tobacco Growers Associations have the misleading notion that the treaty is hostile to their sector.

"The treaty is against the use of tobacco; it deals with consumption, not production. With regard to production, it contains clauses that address the question of tobacco growers."

The Director of the Inca added that the document provides greater security for workers in the sector by determining how chemical products should be used in tobacco cultivation.

To propose a system for monitoring tobacco control activities in the Mercosur and associated neighboring countries, a workshop, which is being held in Rio de Janeiro, will discuss, among other issues, a Tobacco Control Surveillance system for the region.

The meeting ends on October 14, when recommendations will be made for the Mercosur Intergovernmental Commission for Tobacco Control to analyze.

The Commission, in turn, will present its recommendations to the XVII Meeting of Ministers of Health from the Mercosur and Associated Countries, scheduled to take place next month in Brazil.

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