

## National Seminar: Tobacco Prevention in Timor Leste

hosted by Many Hands International in collaboration with Deakin University Australia

Dili, 19th November 2014

The seminar was attended by more than 40 participants from various social organizations, including health departments, non-governmental organizations both national and international, religious organizations, and the World Health Organization as well as representative from the Faculty of Health, Deakin University, Chair of School of Psychology Professor John Toumbourou, PhD.

Professor John invited participants to share their ideas and visions of strategies that might be appropriate for reducing tobacco use in Timor-Leste. This country has one of the highest rates of



tobacco use in the world. Professor John gives a brief overview history of tobacco use in Australia and the success of the government and all parties in Australia on reducing tobacco use for decades. The participants discussed the need for a government to regulate trade and use of tobacco in East Timor.

Meanwhile, the head of the National Non-Communicable Disease Department of Health Ministry, Dr. Herculano Xeixas, described the Government's commitment to addressing the issue of tobacco sales. He commented that the Government, through the Ministry of Health, is committed in the coming years, (2015-2019) to prioritise the issue of tobacco use. He explained that the government will cooperate with various partners and non-governmental organizations both nationally and internationally in this mission.



World Health Organization representative, Mr. Mateus Cunha, MPH, reported that WHO is providing technical support and monitoring the commitment of East Timor in its ratification and implementation of the FCTC. He added that it will be challenging for all parties to control of tobacco use, but WHO seeks to facilitate efforts by providing legal instruments.



Many Hands International Tobacco Use Prevention Project Officer Thomas Lopes reported results of a survey conducted in the Districts of Lautem and Dili, supported by Deakin University. Using a Delphi methodology, this study found that participants recommended legal restrictions on the use of tobacco in workplaces and public places. Some of the challenges are the

use of tobacco as part of people's daily life, at cultural events, social activities and rituals. Also, the lack of public knowledge about the dangers of tobacco and lack of socialization through health promotion activities in rural areas has added to the increasing trend of tobacco use by young people across East Timor.



A discussion group using MPOWER topics was designed by WHO and facilitated by Thomas Lopes and the Many Hands International team.

The seminar finished with a unanimous agreement to establish a National Alliance for Tobacco Control to co-ordinate and support the collaborative work of many organisations in East Timor, as well as supporting the Government's strategy for tobacco control. The group agreed to meet again on 18th November 2015 to continue discussions and develop an ongoing action plan.

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