

Press Release – TTMA Commends Seizure of Illicit Cigarettes and Cautions Against Purchasing of Illicitly Imported Products

Port of Spain, 20 March 2020 – The Trinidad & Tobago Manufacturers’ Association (TTMA) commends the authorities of St. Lucia in taking swift action against the sale of Zon (King Size full flavour 20 class filter) cigarettes in a recent swoop down against products that do not conform to regulations. Officials issued a public advisory to stop consumers from purchasing the cigarettes and vendors were asked to cease sale and distribution and to submit any stocks in their possession for disposal. The Bureau of Standards also stated that they would prosecute anyone found selling or distributing this product.

Responding to comments that the brand in question has also been seen on the market here in Trinidad and Tobago, President of the TTMA, Franka Costelloe stated, “The action by the St. Lucian authorities is a step in the right direction. It is in the consumers’ interest to purchase regulated products deemed safe by the appropriate regulators. Consumers must stop supporting products entering any country illegally, jeopardising our safety and ultimately eroding local business that are compliant and committed to free and fair trade.”

Costelloe added, “There is no doubt that the Caribbean region is being affected by the infiltration of illegal cigarettes and other products. In fact, there are over twenty (20) brands of illegal cigarettes coming into our shores from countries like China, India and Germany with non-compliant packaging and labelling and this not only deprives Governments of revenue collection but poses serious health risks to consumers”.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Tobacco Control Act also contains requirements for the labelling of tobacco products. Contravention of the Act and its Regulations is an offence, and possible consequences include:

1. Suspension, revocation or limitation of licenses,
2. Confiscation and forfeiture of any tobacco product packaged or labelled in a manner that does not conform with this Act, and
3. Confiscation and forfeiture of all tobacco products for which all applicable taxes and duties have not been paid or that otherwise have not legally entered the jurisdiction.

Fines, penalties and imprisonment are also included as measures that can be employed against persons who contravene the law.

Recent developments have caused countries worldwide (including Trinidad and Tobago) to become protective of their respective borders. Consequently, it is important that persons exercise caution in purchasing imported products which do not conform to local standards and regulations, as these products may not be safe for consumption. With reference to local products, Costelloe advises that consumers should focus on buying local products which have been approved by local Government agencies and deemed safe for consumption. “In this way,” she said, “they will be contributing to keeping local businesses alive.”