

## **UK Government Guidelines on tobacco to Overseas Diplomatic Posts**

In answer to a Parliamentary Question, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean) stated:

We have issued the following guidelines to overseas posts:

"1. The Government's White Paper on tobacco, presented to Parliament in December 1998, contained the following sentences concerning the role of Posts overseas:

"We are not in the business of banning the production or export of tobacco products, and the DTI and our embassies will continue to provide advice, to which UK companies are entitled, in the sale of legal products. However, in keeping with the current practice of Ministers and officials not becoming involved in the advertising or promotion of tobacco products at home, guidelines will shortly be issued to our diplomatic posts instructing them to be scrupulous to ensure that they follow suit overseas, taking into account local circumstances."

2. Posts must no longer directly promote products containing tobacco, whether through advertising or through publicly associating HMG with their sale, especially where this might be misconstrued as some form of government endorsement or approval of them. However, given the general, non-discriminatory basis of British Trade International services and other UK government support for business--which, as a matter of principle, are available to all British companies, provided their products are mainly of UK origin and are legal--Posts should nonetheless, if approached, offer support and advice to assist UK tobacco companies through the provision of trade, investment and political information. While it may be true that such companies rarely, in any case, seek HMG assistance in their exporting effort, it will be important that Posts scrupulously adhere to these new guidelines, after taking into account local circumstances. Posts should bear in mind that the international tobacco control lobby is increasingly well organised, and pressure groups may seek to highlight any apparently controversial involvement in an event sponsored by a tobacco company.

3. It follows from the above that Posts should not *inter alia* be associated in any way with the promotion of the tobacco industry, for example by accepting advertisements for UK or local tobacco products in publications issued by the Post, or sponsorship from tobacco companies for their activities, including Chevening Scholarships. Nor should they attend or otherwise support receptions or high profile events--especially those where a tobacco company is the sole or main sponsor--which are overtly to promote tobacco products, such as the official opening of a UK tobacco factory overseas; events where tobacco sponsorship is more low-key (for example, among several sponsors of a visiting orchestra) can be attended. Posts may also continue to offer assistance to UK tobacco companies in other ways, such as in resolving business problems--customs or port clearance, smuggling, trademark violations etc.--that are potentially discriminatory. They may also provide information and assistance on foreign country policies and investment opportunities including advice to help them comply with foreign government laws or regulations.

4. In short, unless otherwise specified above, Posts should not support activities designed specifically to encourage smoking. Posts have the delegated authority to decide for themselves whether any proposed action on their part is in keeping with these new regulations, but may refer to London for decision--to the FCO geographical department (if there are political implications) or JEPD--where this is felt necessary.

5. The White Paper also stressed the Government's wish to encourage and support the efforts of other countries to strengthen their own tobacco control strategies. Requests for help, particularly with expertise, should be passed to the Department of Health (Health Promotion Division).

6. These guidelines will take effect from 1 June 1999."

Hansard, 18 May 1999 : Column WA18-19

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199899/ldhansrd/vo990518/text/90518w01.htm>