Mediaverklaring

25 Mei 2020

Agri SA doen ‘n beroep op die regering om ondersoek in te stel en op te tree teen onwettige handel in tabakprodukte

Die onwettige handel in tabakprodukte het ongetwyfeld aansienlik toegeneem oor die afgelope weke. Die breër publiek neem kennis en word ook deur die media ingelig oor die onwettige handel in tabakprodukte wat op ‘n ongekende skaal toeneem.

Volgens News24, het die polisiewoordvoerder, Brigadier Motantsi Makhele, bevestig dat ‘n 39-jarige man wat onwettige sigarette ter waarde van R636 800 vervoer het, op Vrydag, 22 Mei in Botshabelo in die Vrystaat gevang is. Die polisie het agt bokse vol onwettige sigarette in die voertuig gevind.

Die nuusagentskap IOL het op Donderdag, 7 Mei berig dat metro-polisiebeamptes in Bellville op sigarette ter waarde van R750 000 beslag gelê het.

Volgens ‘n SAPD-nuusverslag het polisiebeamptes van die eThekwini-Sentraal klustertaakspan drie mans tussen die ouderdom van 29 en 36 gearresteer nadat ‘n groot hoeveelheid sigarette op 3 Mei 2020 ontdek is. Beslag is gelê op 71 houers tabak, voorgeskrewe medikasie en onwettige sigarette. Die gesamentlike waarde van die items beloop ongeveer R800 000. Die verdagtes is aangekla van handel in onwettige sigarette.

Bogenoemde voorbeelde dui daarop dat die besluit om ‘n verbod te plaas op wettige tabakverkope nie die nodige gesondheids- en maatskaplike uitkomstes tot gevolg gehad het nie. Rokers koop nou op groot skaal onwettige sigarette wat nie voldoen aan die bedryf en regering se veiligheidstandaarde nie. Daar is ook bevind dat hierdie produkte skadelike bestanddele en chemikalieë bevat wat selfs ‘n groter gesondheidsrisiko vir rokers inhou.

Agri SA doen dringend ‘n beroep op die regering om die verbod op formele handel in tabakprodukte op te hef. Dit is nou duidelik dat die verbod geen doel dien nie, aangesien verbruikers nie opgehou rook het nie. Dit is ook duidelik dat die wettige tabakwaardeketting en die betrokke werkers geweldige ekonomiese skade ly.

Die staat verloor maandeliks belastinginkomste ter waarde van ongeveer R1,5 miljard. Die enigste wenners is diegene wat voordeel trek uit onwettige handel. Dit dra beslis nie by tot die pogings om die verspreiding van die virus te voorkom nie en sal geensins die ekonomiese skade van die inperking herstel nie.

Agri SA is ten volle daartoe verbind om ten volle uitvoering aan alle pogings en regulasies te gee wat ten doel het om die virus en die dodelike impak daarvan te mitigeer. Sodanige pogings en regulasies moet egter rasioneel, logies en in lyn met internasionale goeie praktyk wees. Dit is tans nie die geval in Suid-Afrika nie. Die regering moet nou beslis optree om sy geloofwaardigheid onder die publiek te herwin.

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Agri SA appeals to government to investigate and act on illegal trade of tobacco products

The illegal trade of tobacco products has gained irrefutable momentum during the past few weeks. The broader public takes notice and is being informed by the media of the illegal trading of tobacco products on an unprecedented scale.

According to News24, police spokesperson Brigadier Motantsi Makhele confirmed that a 39-year-old man was caught transporting illicit cigarettes worth R636 800 on Friday 22nd May in Botshabelo, Free State. The police found eight boxes filled with illicit cigarettes in a vehicle.

The news agency IOL stated that on Thursday, 7th May, metro police officers recovered cigarettes valued at R750 000 in Bellville.

According to a SAPS news report, police officers from the eThekwini Central Cluster Task Team arrested three men aged between 29 and 36 after a large quantity of cigarettes were discovered on 3 May 2020. During the operation 71 boxes of tobacco, prescription drugs and illicit cigarettes were recovered. The recovered items are estimated to be approximately R800 000-00 in value. The suspects were charged for dealing in illicit cigarettes.

The examples cited above, indicate that the decision to ban the formal and legal tobacco trade has not had the necessary health and social benefits. Smokers are now buying illicit cigarettes at an unprecedented scale. Much of the illicit traded cigarettes do not adhere to industry and Government safety standards and has been found in instances to contain foreign particles and chemicals that pose even more health dangers for smokers.

Agri SA is also urgently calling on government to lift the ban on the formal trade of tobacco products. It is now clear that the ban serves no purpose, as consumers have not stopped using tobacco. What is clear is that the legal tobacco value chain and the workers employed, are suffering tremendous economic hardships.

The state loses taxes to the tune of R1,5 billion monthly. The only winners are those benefitting from the illicit trade. Surely this is not assisting our efforts to prevent the virus from infecting more and more people and the economy from recovering from the lockdown.

Agri SA remains committed to play our full part in all efforts and regulations to help curb the further spread and deadly impact of the Covid-19 virus. However, such efforts and regulations must be rational, common sensical and must be benchmarkable to global best practice. This currently is not the case in South Africa. Government must now act boldly to regain its credibility with the South African people.

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