

Instructions to TV channels regarding airing of programmes depicting smoking and drinking scenes

Preamble: Television is freely accessible to persons of all age groups including children. There is evidence from research covering many countries that media portrayals of tobacco and alcohol use induce some people especially children and adolescents to imitative smoking and drinking behavior. This is encouraged by glamorizing smoking and drinking on the TV screen.

Tobacco and alcohol products are the two worst killers accounting for most premature deaths and ill-health across the world. In addition they have many social and economic consequences that impinge negatively on social life, well-being and economic development. Recognizing the negative impact of tobacco, alcohol and other narcotic drugs on human health and society, HE the President introduced a programme idealistically titled "*Mathata Thitha*", which aims at freeing society from the harmful effects of these substances.

In line with this programme the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) Act No. 27 of 2006 became operative on 1 December 2006. Since then the display of smoking and drinking scenes on television came to be masked with mosaics. However, the experts opine that this mechanism is ineffective. Therefore, the NATA as one of the main implementing agencies of "*Mathata Thitha*" and the main agency for tobacco and alcohol control in the country has sought and obtained the assistance of the Secretary Ministry of Mass Media and Information to carry out the following protocol with regard to smoking and alcohol scenes on television, **with the primary objective of protecting children from being deceptively enticed to tobacco and alcohol use.**

1. This arrangement will become effective from 01.09.2011.
2. Accordingly, from 01.09.2011. all programmes aired on TV channels should not have smoking or drinking scenes. However, in the case of programmes produced before the date on which the NATA Act became operative (i.e. 01.12.2006.), if there are formidable practical difficulties in deleting such scenes TV channels should conform to the following instructions instead of covering those scenes with mosaics.
 - i. In the full 20 seconds preceding the commencement of the programme TV channels should air the opening message provided by NATA without any obstruction or comment.

- ii. Whenever smoking/ drinking scenes appear during a programme appropriate message provided by NATA should be aired on the bottom or top of the screen in an area occupying not less than 1/5 of the screen.
 - iii. For a programme originally produced in language A and is subtitled or dubbed in language B, the messages in language B should be displayed.
3. Clarifications about messages.
 - (i) The appropriate message should be aired for the full duration depicting the smoking/ drinking scenes.
 - (ii) In the case of a smoking/ drinking scene lasting less than 5 seconds, the minimum duration of display of the message should be 5 seconds.
 - (iii) Scenes depicting only smoking should be accompanied by a message related to tobacco.
 - (iv) Scenes depicting only drinking should be accompanied by a message related to alcohol.
 - (v) The scenes depicting both smoking and drinking should air messages 3 and 5 alternately.
 - (vi) The messages provided by NATA should be rotated in the given order so that all the messages provided are appropriately used.
4. TV channels should air only the messages provided by NATA and they should be aired without any obstruction or comment.
5. The messages provided by NATA will be reviewed and modified periodically as and when necessary.
6. These instructions apply to all TV channels.

In the interest of our children I appeal to producers to desist from producing programmes depicting scenes glamorizing tobacco and alcohol use. I also appeal to TV channels to refrain from airing such programmes. In this context NATA's policy is "prevention through understanding". I invite all concerned people to join NATA in this aspect of "saving the children" project.

Chairman,

NATIONAL AUTHORITY ON TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL