

At the 2nd Latin American Nicotine and Risk Reduction Forum in Panama today,

GLOBAL EXPERTS HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF REDUCED-RISK ALTERNATIVES IN THE COMPREHENSIVE FIGHT AGAINST SMOKING

- *The forum focused on promoting public health policies based on human rights and scientific evidence.*
- *Panels addressed the need for legal access to reduced-risk alternatives, such as electronic cigarettes, for millions of smokers.*
- *Forum's participants signed a manifesto calling on COP10 delegates to avoid prohibition and look at scientific evidence and consumers' perspectives.*

Panama City, February 6th, 2024.– Razón Autonomía Derecho A.C, RAUDER, a non-profit civil association that advocates for human rights, personal autonomy, and the free development of personality, organized the "2nd Latin American Nicotine and Risk Reduction Forum: Science, Regulation, and Activism" that took place today in Panama City. The objective was to analyze and discuss the crucial role of reduced-risk alternatives in the fight against tobacco.

The forum brought together legislators, experts, doctors, scientists, and activists from across the globe. They emphasized the importance of developing public policies that aim towards harm reduction and respect for human rights, and called for a humane and effective approach, that respects consumers' rights and provides safe, science-based regulated options.

Conversations were around studies and relevant practices from various countries on how alternatives such as vapor products can significantly contribute to harm reduction in smoking. Participants emphasized that their prohibition in countries such as Mexico, Brazil and Panama, has led to an increase in illegal trade and limits smokers' options to access safer alternatives.

"It is essential to recognize and regulate vapor products as reduced-risk alternatives. Prohibition not only prevents smokers from legal options but drives the black market, and gives easier access to minors, besides, all the other negative consequences that it implies," explained Rafael Lara Liy, RAUDER's director.

Lara also emphasized the importance of science-based information in enabling consumers to make informed decisions; he stressed the need for all voices to be considered in developing public policies. "Prohibition does not work nor does it solve the problem; the whole of society has the right to participate in shaping public policy. We want to contribute a perspective that also considers consumers' rights and information based on scientific evidence regarding reduced-risk alternatives," he said.

Doctor Marina Hoyo, a forum's panelist said: "as health professionals, we have a responsibility to stay up to date, analyze, understand, and question the evidence. But we also need to approach our patient care from a position of empathy towards people seeking to improve their health. That's why we must consider alternatives that reduce risks. This is the foundation of a therapeutic bond that aims to truly help the individual and not stigmatize them, but rather try to alleviate their condition."

The case of other countries, such as Brazil, was also discussed. In Brazil, the ban on vapor products since 2009 has led to an uncontrolled and unsanitary illegal market, affecting millions of smokers, according to Juan José Cirión Lee, President of the organization "México y el Mundo Vapeando." We urge the Brazilian National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) not to miss the opportunity to regulate alternative nicotine consumption products, considering their potential for risk reduction and respect for human rights," he added.

"Whenever there is a health risk, regulation is necessary. We, as legislators, have the responsibility to act immediately. Our experience indicates that we should regulate, but not prohibit," explained Víctor Manuel Salcedo, member of the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia.

Studies show a significant reduction in smoking rates through reduced-risk alternatives. "The results of studies in Sweden are a clear example of what can be achieved with reduced-risk alternatives. In just 15 years, Sweden has reduced its smoking rates from 15% to 5.6% and has achieved a mortality rate from tobacco-related diseases 39.6% lower than the EU average. This success is attributed to the accessibility, acceptability, and affordability of safer alternatives, combined with balanced regulations and awareness campaigns. This case demonstrates the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach that includes reduced-risk alternatives to reduce smoking," explained Roberto Sussman, Researcher at the UNAM Institute of Nuclear Sciences in Mexico.

RAUDER has created an online petition to strengthen the collective voice in defense of human rights, health, and legal access to nicotine alternatives. Those interested in signing the petition or supporting the cause can do so by visiting the dedicated space on the [Change.org platform](#).

The forum concluded with a manifest that demands all Latin American governments to avoid prohibitions and develop science-based regulatory frameworks. "Our goal is to ensure that smokers have access to less harmful alternatives as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce the impact of smoking on public health and that our voices are heard. This perspective is especially relevant in the context of the Tenth Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (COP 10), taking place this week in Panama," added Rafael Lara, Director of RAUDER.

"It is important to emphasize that we share the fundamental goal of protecting public health. We advocate for the voices of consumers to be considered in discussions and decision-making that significantly impact their human rights and global health," Lara emphasized.

About RAUDER

RAUDER, short for Razón, Autonomía y Derecho, A.C., is a non-profit organization composed of experts in various fields of knowledge. Their mission is to promote and defend human rights and their respect in the daily life of society. The organization aims to influence society and public policies with the banner of respect for human rights in all aspects of social development, providing citizens with clarity about which rights they can assert concerning their governing authorities.

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