

## PRESS RELEASE

### *Indian Youth Join Global Fight Against Films Projecting Tobacco Use*

Today's worldwide protest against movies promoting tobacco to children is also resonating in DELHI, where student representatives of **HRIDAY** (*Health Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth*) -**SHAN** (*Student Health Action Network*) an NGO, appealed to the Central Board of Film Certification for complete ban on projection of tobacco use and brand identification of a tobacco product in Indian films.

February 22, 2005 is being observed as "The International Day of Action" by the Smoke Free Movies Network. To mark this day, world wide, Tobacco Control Advocates are organizing events to fight against tobacco menace on screen. HRIDAY-SHAN is one of over 30 groups in 20 countries (Algeria, Argentina, Benin, Cameroon, Canada, Cook Islands, France, Georgia, Israel, Malaysia, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, USA, Vietnam and Zimbabwe) around the world who are a part of this action.

The WHO study contends that the tobacco industry has shifted its focus from Hollywood to Bollywood. The industry is particularly targeting women and youth in the developing countries. Bollywood has the power to influence attitudes and the behaviour of its audience, especially the youth, because of its size, popularity and tremendous reach.

A recent WHO study on the portrayal of tobacco in Indian cinema shows Bollywood is to a large extent responsible for glamorizing smoking. Despite the WHO's appeal to films, tobacco continues to be lit freely on the silver screen. Be it Mr. Sanjay Dutt in *Musafir*, Mr. John Abraham in *Elaan*, Mr. Saif Ali Khan in *Ek Hasina Thi*, Mr. Shah Rukh Khan in *Swades* and *Devdas* or Mr. Zayed Khan in *Vaada*, cigarettes have been dependable props, adding to the star's allure and sophistication. 'Real men smoke' – that's the image being fostered by Bollywood stars in their films. For NGOs, the real issue has been gross rejection of the anti-smoking campaigns by top stars. Mr. Shah Rukh Khan smoking during a TV interview has a powerful negative impact on the youth as most of them see him as their role model. A survey of the Indian film industry, the world's largest, showed that some 320 out of 400 recent Bollywood films contained scenes depicting some form of smoking, with most portraying it as a cool thing to do.

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A recent WHO study reveals that teenagers, who watch Bollywood characters smoke, are three times more likely to do so and if young people see one of their idols light up on-screen, they are 16 times more likely to view smoking positively.

Indian films make a good smokescreen for tobacco companies as India has the largest film producing industry in the world. Approximately 15 million people watch an Indian film everyday either in theatre or at home on television. A total of 62 tobacco brands have been shown in Bollywood over the last 12 years. The results of this study are frightening and call for an immediate public health response to counter these practices.

On this day HRIDAY-SHAN is appealing to all concerned stakeholders in government departments and NGOs and especially the celebrities in Bollywood to join hands to help us fight this global battle against tobacco.

Monika Arora  
Director  
HRIDAY-SHAN