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Update on beer promoters in Cambodia – press information

Following the set up of Beer Selling Industry Cambodia (BSIC) in December 2006 and the introduction of an agreed Code of Conduct for Beer Promoters to help improve the safety and working conditions for beer promoters in Cambodia, BSIC has now, as promised, conducted an audit to ascertain members' compliance with the Code.

The audit has been performed by the independent Cambodian research institute, Center for Advanced Study (CAS).

The internal audit is based on interviews with 493 beer promoters among BSIC member companies (Cambodia Brewery Ltd., Cambrew/Carlsberg, Heineken, and Guinness.).

It was found that there is already full compliance on the part of all BSIC members in terms of:

- the provision of comprehensive training and orientation programmes aimed at contributing to the health and safety of beer promoters,
- the rejection of commission-only work,
- the provision of uniforms which are decent and accepted by beer promoters themselves and
- the provision of company transport from work to the home after working hours.

Fewer than 7% of respondents from the four companies reported being unhappy with their current working conditions. Moreover, overall 90% of beer promoter respondents who had previously worked for non-BSIC members reported that in their current employment they considered themselves safer in the workplace, better able to deal with difficult customers, more supported by their 'direct superior', and better trained to look after their health. This finding suggests that as a result of the Code, a safer and healthier work environment is provided for their employees. Further support of this is the fact that 29% had worked with their company for more than two years. Their salary is higher than other industries in a shorter working week (average around 30 hours). On average, BSIC member Beer Promoters will take home over US\$ 80.00 per month. In comparison, textile factory workers now receive US\$ 56.00 per month for 48 hours per week (in a new wage settlement). For further comparison, waitresses receive less than US\$ 50.00 per month. Additional comparative research into working conditions offered by BSIC and non-BSIC members would be useful, and could be used to promote the benefits of and

lobby for wider adoption of the Code of Conduct. For this purpose, other brewers are invited to join the BSIC in order to achieve a maximum and long-term effect.

However, BSIC still faces challenges as inconsistencies, or non-compliance with the Code of Conduct were identified in a number of key areas. These include beer promoters' perceived contractual status, the effective promotion and provision of company transport, and the establishment and successful implementation of a formal grievance procedure for beer promoters to register complaints about their general working conditions and report cases of verbal, physical or sexual abuse or harassment. BSIC members are generally pleased with the progress done, but recognise the responsibility to make further improvements.

The introduction of a standard formal grievance procedure by all BSIC member companies is particularly urgent, given the survey findings that over 38% of beer promoters from all four companies experience sexual harassment on a regular basis, and over 70% have experienced customers attempting to force them to drink alcohol.

Many respondents have indicated that they report such problems to their direct superiors and other company representatives, and that they receive support in attempting to resolve these issues. However, the current lack of formal reporting procedures in relation to such incidents means that it is difficult for the BSIC to monitor the extent of workplace abuse and harassment affecting beer promoters and to identify outlets where these are more likely to place, in order to devise strategic responses, as well as monitoring other aspects of working conditions.

CAS concludes that to improve compliance to the Code of Conduct a series of additional measures are required by BSIC members, including:

- the review of current contractual arrangements and more effective communication of contractual information,
- interventions to improve the quality and uptake of company transport
- the creation of a standard, formal grievance procedure across all members.

It may be helpful for each individual member of BSIC to use the baseline survey findings to establish new targets for certain areas, against which their particular progress in Code of Conduct compliance can be measured. The Code of Conduct should also be promoted amongst company employees, outlet owners, local and national government and wider civil society as part of a broader effort to improve the working conditions of beer promoters, CAS recommends.

Based on the findings and recommendations by CAS, BSIC members (*or company name*) have decided to introduce further measures to help improve the safety and working conditions of beer promoters.

These measures include:

- BSIC will develop outlet agreement regarding conditions for BSIC member companies to supply outlets with beer promoters. This includes e.g. zero tolerance towards harassment and impress upon outlet owners the no sitting and drinking with clients' policy. If a given outlet does not live up to expectations laid down in the contract, the company and possibly all BSIC members will withdraw its beer promoters. It is recognised that such an initiative will meet significant outlet owner resistance.
- Grievance procedures. All beer promoters will receive additional training in grievance procedures and be urged to report relevant incidents. BSIC will then align company procedures and initiate input to a joint BSIC grievance database. The purpose of the database is to be able to monitor complaints and support appropriate responses vis-à-vis outlets.
- Carry out further actions, including audit, this year focussing on reducing harassment, avoiding sitting with clients and drinking alcohol on the job.
- Other initiatives by BSIC designed to improve the overall working conditions of beer promoters include: a review of drivers transporting beer promoters from outlets to their home; assign an NGO to develop improved training modules focussing on how to avoid harassment plus clarity and adoption of grievance procedures; asking other brewers operating in Cambodia to join BSIC: development of a BSIC social marketing campaign will be explored.

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