

GAPA Chairman visits Thailand Report by Nattika Changprasert International Project Assistant, StopDrink Network

During 26th – 28th November 2007, Mr Derek Rutherford, the Globe Editor in Chief and Chair of the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA), visited Thailand with Mr Aneurin Owen,

They took the opportunity to file a letter supporting the Thai Alcohol Control Bill addressed to Dr Meechai Ruchupan, the Chairperson of the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) and given to Ms Uma Sukontama, NLA Member, at the Parliament on 27 November 2007. In addition, Mr Rutherford and Mr Owen had a chance to share their



views on global alcohol control policy with some other NLA Members such as Mr Krayim Santrakul, General Parnthep Bhuwanarchnurak, and Mr Somchai Sawaengkarn.

During the discussion, Mr Rutherford said that GAPA has been monitoring the growing epidemic of problems associated with alcohol intoxication and dependence worldwide, particularly in the Asian region which has become a strategic market for the alcohol industry. The rising trend in alcohol consumption especially in the younger generation needs appropriate action and political courage to ameliorate these problems. He further stated that the World Bank Development Report 2007 is concerned that young people are exposed to a greater range of health risks than before due to the growth of non-communicable diseases.

Mr Rutherford said encouragingly, “We acknowledge Thailand’s past leadership in alcohol control policy and offer our congratulations on your willingness to take a further step to strengthen your policy advocacy toward legislation on alcohol control. In this perspective, Thailand’s proactive leadership on such an important law is not only a good example for other countries in the region, but it will add to the international respect your country has already earned in this field”.



Besides meeting with NLA Members, the GAPA representatives joined the StopDrink Network meeting, of which the objective was to prepare and organise the demonstration

emboldening the NLA to pass the alcohol control bill on the following day (28 November 2007). They admired the Network's contribution on pushing forward alcohol control policy to protect Thai society, especially the younger generation, from the harms of alcohol.

On the day when the NLA considered the alcohol control bill in the final round, Mr Rutherford and Mr Owen observed the demonstration in front of the parliament, where the crowd expressed their views and youth groups gave performances illustrating why the alcohol control bill is necessary. Both of the observers were impressed by the power of the demonstrating group and suggested that this magnificent rally should be repeated in other parts of the world to stop the global march to a culture of alcohol intoxication.

The demonstrating group were however disappointed by ensuing events. The parliamentary result on the alcohol control bill disappointed the crowd and supporting Thais because of the amendment on the alcohol advertisement ban under section 31, which allows alcoholic beverages to be broadcast if there is no picture of an alcohol container shown in the advertisement, except for the symbol of that beverage and company.

The Minister of Public Health, Dr Mongkol Na Songkhla, seeing this amendment, withdrew the bill from the NLA and the bill will be reviewed and resubmitted to the NLA at a later time before the general election.

On 21 December, the last NLA meeting of the interim government, the draft legislation was resubmitted to the NLA in order to be reviewed in the second and third rounds, and it eventually received approval from the NLA. However, sections 31/1-34 covering various advertisement issues were removed. The items omitted included the advertisement ban on radio and television, in theatres, advertisements in print media and on billboards, sponsorship, use of alcohol logos on non-alcoholic beverages and the use of the name companies on advertisement. However the Ministry of Public Health will be able to draft a ministerial regulation for such controls at a later date.