

Smoking banned in hotel for delegates

The ashtrays and matches in the guest rooms at Jingxi Hotel, one of the designated hotels for deputies to the National People's Congress, have been removed this year.

The small move, for Shen Jinjin, an NPC deputy and a longtime anti-tobacco campaigner, is a big step forward in tobacco control.

As an NPC deputy for the past decade, he brought forward various suggestions to combat smoking, some of which have been accepted, such as the 100 percent smoking ban in public places introduced by Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai.

"We've seen strong restrictive measures over tobacco advertising in the new Advertising Law," added Shen, head of the Disease Control and Prevention Center in Yancheng, Jiangsu province.

"At the two sessions over the years, positive changes can be seen," he said.

Previously, participants in the two sessions even smoked during group discussions in the meeting rooms, and ashtrays and matches were widely placed.

In that scenario, "I would stop people politely and deliver anti-smoking messages, particularly the proven health-related hazards," he said. "NPC deputies are usually influential and I don't want to miss the opportunity to spread the message of tobacco control."

As a veteran public health worker, Shen knows well the negative health impacts from smoking and the huge medical bills from treating smoking-related diseases.

The National Health and Family Planning Commission estimates that more than 1 million Chinese die from smoking-related diseases each year.

With more information becoming available to the public, a consensus about smoking control has been gradually reached in China, the world's largest cigarette producer and consumer.

In 2015, Beijing passed the country's strongest anti-smoking law, and delegates to the two sessions thereafter became able to enjoy a truly smoke-free environment in the city.

"Now they can only smoke outside the hotel, despite the chilly and windy weather here in early March," he said.

Also, they began to accept a controlled way of smoking and "some smoking deputies even co-signed my motion urging the country to pass a State-level anti-smoking law," he noted.

Beijing pioneered the introduction of strong smoking bans in public places,

which should be expanded nationwide, he urged.

"We have the knowledge that smoking harms health and we have wide support from the public for smoking controls. Why is it so difficult to make a national law?" he said.

In November, Mao Qun'an, spokesman for the National Health and Family Planning Commission, the nation's top health authority, said a national law would be enacted in 2016—and though the commission was charged to draft such a law, it didn't.

Shen blamed that on interference from the tobacco industry, a major source of tax revenue for the government. "The fight is not over, and I will keep up the effort," he said.

Audits help money get to the poor

Inspection and audit efforts to prevent the improper use of poverty relief funds have paid off, said the top poverty relief official.

Liu Yongfu, director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, made the comment on Tuesday during a news conference at the fifth session of the 12th National People's Congress.

"In 2013, we audited poverty relief funds used in 17 counties, where 15 percent of the money was improperly used," Liu said. "In 2016, we audited 30 counties and the ratio was down to only 3 percent."

He said the country's disciplinary watchdog unearthed about 16,000 cases related to improper use of poverty relief funds in 2016, leading to more than 19,000 people being punished. A hotline set up by the office has received more than 10,000 phone calls in the past two years.

"Previously, the majority of problems were related to corruption and waste. Now, the main problem is many of the funds are kept in the account unused," Liu said.

"More problems are now found in townships and villages instead of cities and counties."

He said the government will also help grassroots officials improve their ability to "spend the money well". Each county is encouraged to set up a database so that the funds and projects are subject to public supervision.

China lifted 12.4 million rural residents out of poverty last year as part of the central government's campaign to lift the remaining poverty-stricken people out of poverty by 2020. There are still 43.3 million people living below the poverty line of 2,300 yuan (\$335) in annual income, according to

National Bureau of Statistics.

Last year, China managed to increase the average per capita annual income of rural residents living in registered poor areas to 8,452 yuan, an increase of 8.4 percent compared with 2015, according to the bureau.

Minister welcomes report on substance misuse among older adults

The independent Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) was asked by the Welsh Government to provide advice on the additional actions needed to tackle the problem of substance misuse in an ageing population.

Older adults are forming an increasingly large proportion of the population; they are also, as a group, more likely than earlier generations to develop substance misuse problems. This is resulting in greater demands on health, social care and other services.

The [Report](#), published today, concludes that although there is significant work already underway, substance misuse services need to adapt to meet the needs of older adults, and more specialist older adults' services need to be developed.

Interim Chair of the Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse, Richard Ives, said:

“The proportion of older adults in the population is increasing rapidly, and so is the number of older adults with substance use problems. Services must respond to this social change and need to be flexible in providing effective treatment for older clients.”

In welcoming the Report, Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Substance misuse among older adults is a growing problem. Levels of alcohol and drug misuse – including illicit drugs and prescription and over-the-counter medication – is a cause of concern.

“The Welsh Government, together with Public Health Wales, is taking forward a range of actions to support this group of people, including implementing a new treatment framework specifically targeted at older substance misusers.

“But we recognise that challenges remain and we agreed that APoSM

should explore and advise the Welsh Government on this, to examine what more could be done to tackle this issue. I would like to thank the Panel for this comprehensive Report which will be a useful contribution to our evidence base on substance misuse among older adults, as we look to build on the good work already underway in Wales.”

Chinese federation holds Women's Day gathering



A gathering celebrating International Women's Day is held in Beijing, capital of China, March 7, 2017. The All-China Women's Federation held a gathering attended by Chinese women from various circles and foreign diplomats here on Tuesday ahead of International Women's Day. (Xinhua/Zhang Yuwei)

The All-China Women's Federation held a gathering attended by Chinese women from various circles and foreign diplomats here on Tuesday ahead of International Women's Day.

The federation has carried out the decisions made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and pushed forward reform to better serve women over the past year, said the federation's president Shen Yueyue in a speech.

Shen, who is also vice chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said the federation will unify and lead the country's women to follow the Party and make new contributions to welcome the 19th CPC National Congress, slated for later this year.

China is willing to work together with women worldwide in building a community of shared future, she added.

More than 1,000 people were present at the event to observe International Women's Day on March 8.

UN human rights experts call for global treaty to regulate dangerous pesticides

7 March 2017 – Two United Nations human rights experts are calling for a comprehensive new global treaty to regulate and phase out the use of dangerous pesticides in farming, and move towards sustainable agricultural practices.

“Excessive use of pesticides are very dangerous to human health, to the environment and it is misleading to claim they are vital to ensuring food security,” the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, and the Special Rapporteur on Toxics, Baskut Tuncak, said in a joint statement to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The Special Rapporteurs pointed to research showing that pesticides were responsible for an estimated 200,000 acute poisoning deaths each year. Some 99 per cent of fatalities occurred in developing countries where health, safety and environmental regulations were weaker.

Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility. Farmers and agricultural workers, communities living near plantations, indigenous communities and pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure and require special protections.

The experts particularly emphasized the obligation of States to protect the rights of children from hazardous pesticides, also warning that certain pesticides can persist in the environment for decades and pose a threat to the entire ecological system on which food production depends.

While acknowledging that certain international treaties currently offer protection from the use of a few pesticides, they stressed that a global treaty to regulate the vast majority of them throughout their life cycle does not yet exist, leaving a critical gap in the human rights protection framework.

“Without harmonized, stringent regulations on the production, sale and acceptable levels of pesticide use, the burden of the negative effects of pesticides is felt by poor and vulnerable communities in countries that have less stringent enforcement mechanisms,” they emphasized.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.