DOH told: Bring up rights of vapers during WHO gab

AN Asian alliance of tobacco harm reduction advocacy organizations has asked the Department of Health to bring up the rights of Filipino smokers who want to switch to safer alternatives during the Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in November.

The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates also asked the DOH to question the restrictive policy of WHO that tolerates the use of combustible cigarettes while discouraging the use of 95-percent less harmful smoke-free Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS).

CAPHRA sent separate letters this month to Asian health ministers who will lead the preparation of their countries’ position on ENDS, preparatory to the WHO meet.

There are 181 parties to the WHO FCTC, a global treaty that seeks “to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke.”

The regular sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) are held every two years and will be held this year in the Netherlands. WHO asked every signatory country to submit a summary of its position on ENDS preparatory to FCTC COP9.

The alliance said tobacco use causes a million deaths per year in the Asia Pacific region, with smoke as the main culprit. It said that e-cigarettes provide smokers with an option to get away from smoking and could hasten the demise of the cigarette.

CAPHRA said the FCTC has a mandate to pursue “harm reduction” as a core tobacco control policy but it has failed to acknowledge or implement this policy over the last 18 years. It has effectively deprived smokers of an effective way out of smoking, according to the coalition.

The coalition also noted that the successive FCTC-COPs had refused to consider the overwhelming scientific evidence proving ENDS to be a much less harmful alternative to smoking and an extraordinarily effective smoking cessation strategy that has worked for millions of smokers in developed countries.

“The WHO FCTC approach to smoke-free alternatives is not only outdated but is making fertile ground to create an even more insidious and very real public health crisis,” CAPHRA said.