

WTO Accepts Cuban, Dominican Complaints over Australia Tobacco Law



Geneva, April 26 (RHC) -- The World Trade Organization (WTO) agreed on Friday to create a commission to discuss and resolve complaints from Cuba and the Dominican Republic against Australia over a controversial tobacco law.

The dispute refers to Australia's requirement that tobacco products come in plain packaging, and was submitted to the Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO.

This is the first time that Cuba presents the issue before the WTO, but the Dominican Republic does it for the second time, with the support of Ukraine, Honduras and Indonesia.

Under the rule, tobacco products have to be sold in drab green boxes, use the same typeface and contain graphic images of diseased smokers.

Along fellow plaintiffs, Cuba and the Dominican Republic say that by covering all tobacco products, not just cigarettes, the legislation harms their traditional cigar brands.

WTO OMC

Cuban and Dominican tobacco industries have high international acceptance, and the Australian law prevents them to differentiate themselves from the rest of the competition, thus damaging a major source of income for their countries.

According to a report by the WTO, Australia explained that tobacco's harmful effects should be highlighted considering that consumption is a global epidemic of lethal consequences.

Australian representatives rejected the marketing practice applied to cigarettes and cigars packaging as disproportionate, while defending the neutral and non-discriminatory nature for the plain packaging, which is applied without distinction of type and origin of the product.

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