

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ontario Budget Lacks Action Against Organized Crime

March 27th, 2023 (Toronto, Ontario) – The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco’s (NCACT) Executive Director, Rick Barnum, responded today to the latest budget tabled by Ontario’s Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy. Barnum is an over 30-year veteran of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), retiring as the Deputy Commissioner overseeing organized crime.

“We are disappointed to see that the Ontario government has again ignored the growing issue of contraband tobacco that is fueling organized crime across the province,” began Barnum. “While the government continues to consider action, criminal gangs are making millions of dollars every day off illegal tobacco.”

Ontario continues to be the greatest source of illegally manufactured tobacco, where one in three cigarettes continue to be illegal, with the provincial government estimating that it loses over \$750 million a year in tobacco taxes to contraband tobacco. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) estimate there are over 175 organized crime groups are involved in the illicit trade.

“Criminal gangs are using these proceeds of crime to fuel their other illegal activities, including drugs, guns and human trafficking. 21 individuals were recently arrested in Manitoba with illegal tobacco alongside cocaine, fentanyl, crystal meth, all from Ontario. Unfortunately, the Government of Ontario is fully aware of the situation, yet continue to hold back on law enforcement since 2018,” continued Barnum.

The NCACT has been advocating for years for Ontario to take similar actions taken in Quebec, where they have seen an over 50% decline in contraband tobacco due to concerted law enforcement action. The Government of Quebec reports that they have increased their tobacco taxes by over \$200 million due to specific action against illegal tobacco.

“We are again calling on the Government of Ontario to support law enforcement across the province to address criminal gangs trafficking contraband tobacco. Without action now, the illicit trade will continue to grow and fund other illegal activities that are harming communities across the province,” concluded Barnum.

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The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco is a Canadian advocacy group formed by organizations and associations concerned about the growing danger of contraband cigarettes. NCACT members share the goals of working together to educate people and urge government to take quick action to stop this growing threat. More information about the Coalition can be found on our website, www.stopcontrabandtobacco.ca.

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