

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coalition Responds to Major Illegal Tobacco Bust by OPP

June 11th, 2020 – Today, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) announced a major bust of contraband tobacco and other illicit products through Project CAIRNES. 16 people were arrested for 218 offences in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.

“We would like to congratulate the OPP and all other law enforcement agencies for this major bust. The results of Project CAIRNES clearly show that illegal tobacco is a major driver for organized crime in Ontario and across Canada.” began Ron Bell, a 30-year law enforcement veteran who is now the Law Enforcement Advisor for the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco (NCACT). “Organized crime groups have acted with near impunity for decades selling contraband tobacco and making millions of dollars off the illicit trade.”

Project CAIRNES brought multiple law enforcement agencies together which culminated in the arrest of 16 people tied to an illegal tobacco manufacturing plant on the Six Nations territory in southwestern Ontario. The project led to the seizure of 11.5 million contraband cigarettes, 1,714 pounds of illegal cannabis, three handguns, cocaine and fentanyl. The street value of all illicit products seized exceeded \$5 million.

“Southwestern Ontario is the epicentre of contraband tobacco in Canada. Millions of illegal cigarettes are manufactured daily and are transported to all parts of the country by organized crime groups who are also involved in the sale and distribution of illegal cannabis, cocaine and human trafficking. Project CAIRNES makes it clear that contraband tobacco is a major issue that governments have paid little to no attention to.” continued Bell.

An EY report released by the Government of Ontario in 2018 found that the province loses over \$750 million in provincial excise tax annually to contraband tobacco. The RCMP have found that over 175 organized crime groups are involved in the illicit trade, utilizing over 50 illegal manufacturing plants, the majority located in southwestern Ontario. One in three cigarettes sold in the province continue to be illegal.

“Now is not time for another consultation on contraband tobacco. Project CAIRNES and dozens of other contraband tobacco seizures make it clear that this is a major issue in Ontario that is fueling organized crime. The Ontario Government must take action now to stop this illegal trade, stop criminals and return proceeds to the public treasury.” concluded Bell.

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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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