



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Alcohol is not like oat – the European Commission of all should know!

Today, in reaction to calls from their Thai partners and friends, young Europeans send an urgent call to the European Commission, the Member States of the EU and the broader public: alcohol is no ordinary commodity! Andrea Lavesson, president of Active – sobriety, friendship and peace, explains the background: “We have received calls for support from our Thai friends in protecting the health and social safety of young people in Thailand, where right now the European Commission is conducting negotiations with the Thai government about mutual Free Trade Agreement. The problem is, and that bothers many young people in Thailand, that the European Commission puts pressure on the Thais to include alcohol into the Free Trade Agreement even though the Thai government is against it for the simple reason – to protect public health.”

In fact, the negotiations have been put on halt for the Thai government to consult with civil society and assess the health and social impacts if alcohol be included as trade commodity in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). While civil society protests against an inclusion, the business sector of importers, hotels, tourism enterprises, restaurants and alcohol industry mount heavy campaigns to get alcohol from Europe into the country.

Alcohol costs the Europeans 125 Billion tax payers € per year, an amount that is more than four times higher than what alcohol production, retail and consumption contribute to the economy. A disproportionate amount of the medical, psychological and social costs has to be shouldered by young Europeans under 25. Despite these facts and the apparent economical imbalance, the European Commission labels alcohol as an important agro-food export commodity.

“This alarms both Thai and European youth – and together we say: alcohol is not like oat. It’s surely no ordinary commodity,” says Andrea Lavesson, “even the WHO global alcohol strategy reflects that truth by stating that Public health should be given proper deference in relation to competing interests. We demand that the European Commission protects the integrity of that document that all EU Member States have ratified this year.”

“In Europe we make the experience every day that the alcohol industry makes its way to the decision makers”, tells Andrea Lavesson, “therefore it is important to understand that the alcohol industry’s business methods in developing countries are – and I’m not exaggerating – highly immoral. Alcohol industry violates their own codes of conduct wherever possible and target young people. Beer girls are, among other methods, used to promote alcohol drinks and increase sales.”

Andrea Lavesson sends a clear message to the European Commission and Member States: “Such an industry should not be invited to the table of diplomatic negotiations! If not the European Commission, who is to safeguard the interests of young people and to be a role model in public health protection?”

“Active- sobriety, friendship and peace” is a non - governmental organisation gathering European youth temperance organisations working for a democratic diverse and peaceful world free from alcohol and other drugs where an individual can live up to her full potential. Active has more than 35 000 members in 26 European countries.