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Smoking restrictions up to restaurants: trade group

By Suzanne Dennis

INDIVIDUAL restaurant owners should be able to determine how they cope with the issue of smoking, an international service group has resolved.

International Ho-Re-Ca has rejected the notion that governments should regulate the issue.

The decision was made by delegates at the recent 45th Annual International Ho-Re-Ca (International Organisation of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes) Congress at the Holiday Inn Golden Mile.

The congress adopted an important resolution on the subject of legislation restricting the behaviour of customers in hotels, restaurants and cafes, particularly in reference to accommodating smokers and non-smokers in harmony.

The resolution states the following:

■ International Ho-Re-Ca is concerned about the growing, almost puritanical trend in recent years to restrict or even completely prohibit any of life's pleasures (eating, drinking, smoking etc).

■ Concerning smoking in hotels, restaurants and cafes, International Ho-Re-Ca represents the opinion that it is a matter for the individual proprietor to determine, with his customers, whether and in what way non-smoking rooms or areas should be set up.

■ International Ho-Re-Ca also rejects, on behalf of the protection of free economic activity, the idea that the state should enact legal regulations in this area.

The adoption of the resolution came after discussion sparked by a research study prepared on behalf of International Ho-Re-Ca by Harris Research in London.

A key finding in this research, which was conducted in eight countries including Hong Kong, was that only 17 per cent thought the government should play a part in proportioning smoking and non-smoking areas.

William Mark, president of the Federation of Hong Kong Restaurant Owners, spoke about how



BUTT OUT: William Mark — pressure from outside to restrict smoking.

the resolution applied to Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong people have always favoured accommodation when dealing with their fellow man, a non-interference with the rights of others when they don't impinge on themselves, which must be applauded," Mr Mark said.

"It becomes apparent then that the driving force for restricting smoking has come from elsewhere.

"In this case a very vocal minority, often with a high proportion of foreign activist involvement, has sought to influence government into transplanting Western practices and influences." Mr Mark

said "no restaurant is in business today because it ignored the wishes of its patrons, and I believe that no restaurant should be compelled by those outside the industry to dismiss its customers' preferences lightly".

International Ho-Re-Ca is a worldwide association of hospitality industry employers and organisations, founded in 1949 and based in Switzerland. There are 48 Ho-Re-Ca members in 20 countries.

Speakers representing the territory at the congress included Mr Mark and Martin Barrow, chairman of the Hong Kong Tourist Association.