



SEAR/PR 1524

WHO urges countries to tackle the epidemic of Tobacco

New Delhi, 30 May 2011: On “World No-Tobacco Day”, 31 May 2011, The World Health Organization is focusing global attention on implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). The Framework Convention is the world's first ever global public health treaty developed and adopted under the auspices of the World Health Organization and reflects the power of prevention.

Globally nearly six million people die each year from tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke. The annual global death toll from the epidemic of tobacco use could rise to eight million by 2030. It is estimated that up to one billion people could die from tobacco use the world over during the 21st century. In the WHO South-East Asia Region over 240 million adults smoke tobacco and nearly the same number of adults use smokeless forms of tobacco in different forms.

“WHO is urging governments to prioritize tobacco control, seek alternative methods to finance tobacco control and commit necessary human and financial resources to tackle the tobacco epidemic in their countries”, said Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia. “This is the only way that the WHO Framework Convention can live up to its promise of protecting present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco”.

The Framework Convention embraces all elements of tobacco control. It entered into force and became an international law on 28 February 2005. It is one of the most rapidly and widely embraced treaties in the history of the United Nations in terms of number of signatories, with 172 Member States of the World Health Organization being Parties to the Convention till date.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control includes provisions for reducing demand as well as supply of tobacco products. It also recognizes the importance of international cooperation and helping low- and middle-income countries to meet their treaty obligations. It has catalysed actions across the globe, and elevated the importance of tobacco control as a global health and political issue. It has also stimulated policy changes at the national level and injected new public and private resources into the field.

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In South-East Asia, the countries that are signatories to the WHO Framework Convention are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste. Nine countries have formulated comprehensive national laws to implement the provisions of the Framework Convention. These laws include banning smoking in public places, prohibiting tobacco advertising, sponsorship and promotions, and making tobacco-related health warnings mandatory on the packs of tobacco products.

The Framework Convention recommends 30%–50% coverage for health warnings on tobacco product packages. Some Member States in this Region have gone beyond the Convention's provisions. Thailand has recently upgraded graphic health warnings to cover 55% of the front and back surfaces. The Convention has also led countries to change their tax policies to control this cause of disease and deaths. Some Member countries have demonstrated innovative ways of health financing using tobacco taxation. India has levied a 10% cess on tobacco for the National Rural Health Mission and Thailand is using 2% of its tobacco and alcohol tax for health promotion.

However, all tobacco products are not covered under national tobacco control legislation in some Member countries, and big gaps exist in taxation levels on different tobacco products in many countries. Furthermore, the 100% smoke-free policy in public places has also not been enforced in many Member countries of the Region.

WHO is at the forefront of coordinating and supporting Member States in their efforts at tobacco control. The UN health agency is providing technical support to Member States in implementing the treaty, especially in formulating and drafting legislation, adopting best practices and identifying well-known industry tactics.

For more information please contact:

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