

## **World No Tobacco Day Message: 31 MAY 2011**

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Tobacco control is key to addressing NCDs Tobacco use is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including heart disease and cancer, as well as chronic respiratory disease. With the World Health Organization's World Health Statistics 2011 showing that 4 in 10 men and 1 in 11 women use tobacco, tobacco control is a top priority for reversing the epidemic of NCDs, especially in low-income countries where both tobacco use and NCDs are increasing. This year's World No Tobacco Day on 31 May highlights the need for countries to advance tobacco control by implementing the provisions of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCTC is the world's first public health treaty, and it has been ratified by countries representing 87.4% of the world's population. "173 countries are now Parties to the FCTC, and that is a major achievement for public health that was almost unimaginable a decade ago", says Dr Nils E Billo, Executive Director of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union). "Implementation is the next big hurdle, though, and each country must cross it if we are truly committed to preventing the millions of deaths caused by tobacco-related diseases each year. Under the treaty, Parties are obligated to fulfil commitments ranging from passing tobacco control legislation to warning the public about the dangers of tobacco use for the protection of present and future generations from its harmful consequences. This makes the FCTC not only an important tool for improving tobacco control, but also a valuable contribution to global efforts to tackle NCDs. Strengthening tobacco control is critical not only to health, but also to the global economy. In low-income families, tobacco use diverts much-needed funds from food, shelter, education and health care to tobacco products. Since the FCTC was adopted in 2003, many countries have made progress, yet implementation - and enforcement - of tobacco control legislation remain challenging. Obstacles to be overcome range from a cultural tradition of smoking to a strong dependence on tobacco cultivation; but they must be overcome. Without stronger legislation, WHO predicts the number of deaths per year will rise from 5 to 8 million by 2030 - and most of these deaths will be from NCDs. In April the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Non-communicable Disease Control was held in Moscow in advance of the UN Summit on NCDs in September. The inclusion of tobacco control issues at such a high level and within the discussion on NCDs shows how broad awareness of this issue has become - and how much stronger is the international commitment to a healthier, smokefree, future for the world.

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