

1 June 2016, Beirut – "Get ready for plain packaging" is the theme of World No Tobacco Day 2016, which takes place every year on 31 May. This year, WHO is highlighting the importance of plain packaging as an effective public health intervention to reduce the demand for tobacco. A "plain" tobacco package is one that displays brand names and product names in a standard colour and font style, without using logos, colours, brand images or promotional information. WHO is calling on countries to consider adopting laws to implement plain packaging on all tobacco products.

## **Globally**

Each year 6 million persons lose their lives because of tobacco use. Tobacco is the only legal consumer product that kills when used exactly as intended by the manufacturer. Projections show that 1 billion people will lose their lives as a result of tobacco-related illnesses this century. World No Tobacco Day is WHO's opportunity to save lives and to limit the damage caused by tobacco use.

## **In Lebanon**

In Lebanon, the prevalence of tobacco use is the second highest in the Eastern Mediterranean Region with an overall smoking prevalence among adults of 37%. Estimates show that the prevalence of smoking will increase in the coming years and by 2025, 57% of the male adult and 39% of the female adult population will be smokers. Every year, tobacco kills almost 3500 Lebanese people. In 2011, about 40% of Lebanese school students between the ages of 13 and 15 had smoked cigarettes at least once, and about 38% smoke water pipes. About 70% of Lebanese school students are exposed to cigarette smoke (passive smoking) in their homes and in public places.

Lebanon became a party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in February 2005. Consequently, the national tobacco Control law 174 was issued in 2011, which is an important milestone in reducing tobacco use in the community. The law is an important public health measure that aims at improving people's health, preventing harm to non-smokers health and reducing the economic burden of smoking at the national level.

## **WHO's role**

WHO Country Office in Lebanon has been supporting the national tobacco control programme at the Ministry of Public Health to ensure that the tobacco control activities under implementation are in line with the FCTC and tobacco control law. Such support includes

assisting the development of a work plan for tobacco control, coordinating and following up tobacco control activities undertaken in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the related training workshops, including awareness activities undertaken by the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) NGO on tobacco control in schools.

## **The way forward**

WHO is assisting the national tobacco control programme in finalizing the draft decree to implement pictorial health warnings on tobacco products in Lebanon. Other activities include: working on increasing taxation and pricing of tobacco products; conducting studies and surveys on tobacco control for monitoring tobacco use and prevention policies; and increasing awareness on tobacco health risks.

## **Editor's note**

Tobacco-related illness is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced. Approximately 1 person dies from a tobacco-caused disease every 6 seconds, equivalent to almost 6 million people a year. This is forecast to rise to more than 8 million people a year by 2030, with more than 80% of these preventable deaths occurring among people living in low- and middle-income countries.

Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Tobacco control represents a powerful tool in improving health in communities and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG target 3.4 is to reduce by one third by 2030 premature deaths from NCDs, including cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, cancers and diabetes. NCDs accounted for the deaths of 16 million people under the age of 70 years in 2012 – 82% of which occurred in developing countries.

The WHO FCTC entered into force in 2005. Parties are obliged to take a number of steps to reduce demand and supply for tobacco products. Actions addressed in the Convention include protecting people from exposure to tobacco smoke, banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, banning sales to minors, requiring health warnings on tobacco packaging, promoting tobacco cessation, increasing tobacco taxes and creating a national coordinating mechanism for tobacco control. There are 180 Parties to the Convention.

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