

26 February 2015 - WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ala Alwan said, "WHO supports the decision to increase the tax on cigarettes in Egypt," describing the decision as "consistent with WHO recommendations on tobacco control." The Regional Director agreed with Egypt's Finance Minister Mr Hany Kadry Demian, who stressed that the increase was fully consistent with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. He said that the Egyptian Government had based its decision on the terms of this Treaty, to which Egypt had been a signatory since 2005.

Dr Alwan congratulated the Government, headed by His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, on this important step. He praised the partnership between the Ministries of Health and Finance in application of the full terms of the WHO Framework Convention and wished this example be applied in various countries of the Region. He also expressed the hope that the Government would also increase the tax on other tobacco products, including shisha, not only cigarettes, to prevent smokers from switching from cigarettes to less expensive tobacco products.

The tax increase on tobacco products is one of the most important tobacco control policies that has proved successful in reducing consumption while increasing state revenue at the same time.

WHO stresses in this context that the increase on tobacco taxes, which leads to an increase of 10% in the prices of its products, led to reduced consumption by 4% in high-income countries and to 5% in low- and middle-income countries. WHO also notes that the tax increase on the price of tobacco is one of the most important policies to curb the epidemic, which kills six million people a year.

More than one hundred global studies have shown that the imposition of high taxes on tobacco was also the single most important action that could be taken by national governments to reduce rates of noncommunicable diseases.

WHO has confirmed in previously published studies on the occasion of "World No Tobacco Day" that it was devoted to promoting tax increases on tobacco products. If countries of the Region raised their indirect taxes imposed on cigarette packs by 50%, the Organization estimates that the number of smokers would be reduced by 3.5 million and 785 000 deaths caused by smoking could be avoided.

The Regional Director warned tobacco companies not to attempt to circumvent the decision to increase tobacco taxation through questioning its usefulness and intensifying indirect promotional campaigns, as they frequently do in other countries in issues related to tobacco control policies.

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