

**Statement of I.R. Iran on
“Progress report on the implementation of the regional tobacco control
Strategy”**

**Mr./Madam Chairperson,
Excellences, ladies and gentlemen**

The progress report on Region strategic plan for tobacco control is well noted. The efforts of the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) of the WHO/EMRO in the preparation and implementation of the regional strategic plan is commendable, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the majority of global resources was allocated to combat and control this global health emergency.

Obviously, tobacco industries are doing a lot of efforts in developing and promoting consumption of tobacco products in the region, especially new emerging products and flavored waterpipe tobacco, by targeting youth and women, which could be a high potential and very profitable market for those industries, compared to other WHO regions. This dilemma along with the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic, sanctions and other challenges in the region, were, inter alia, the major obstacles in achieving the 30% reduction target, and in implementing the strategic document of the region.

Despite the international pressures and sanctions, in line with our obligations to protect public health and responding to international commitments, as one of the member of the High-Level Group of health ministers, the I.R. Iran has taken many actions in reducing demand and supply, especially in the field of tobacco cessation counseling services, tax increase, ban on the production and sale of new emerging products, and comprehensive ban on TAPS which are reflected in the 2023 Global Tobacco Control Report.

Revision of the national strategic plan for tobacco control and Plain Packaging protocol for tobacco products is on the agenda of the national headquarter of tobacco control, as the highest level of inter-sectoral coordination mechanism, under the chairmanship of his excellence the minister of health, and membership of ministers of other related executive bodies. Also, an excise tax on tobacco products in addition to VAT law, is considered in the 7th National five-year economic development plan, which MOH is trying to have it approved by the plenary session of the Parliament.

It is obvious that bridging the gaps and challenges, mentioned in the report, requires giving priority to the tobacco control program in all countries of the region., Especially in regional countries affected by sanctions or faces economic issues, the regional office should assist r by raising funds from international resources and engaging the high-level group of the honorable ministers of health in the region to advise solutions.

The Protocol to Eliminate illicit Trade in Tobacco Products is an effective international tool in providing transparency in the supply chain of tobacco products. Unfortunately, the low level of membership of

countries in the region can neutralize or undermine the policies set in other countries who are committed to this international treaty.

We do hope that with collective efforts, the EMR will be introduced as the first Region of WHO where all countries have joined the two international treaties, the WHO FCTC and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

In general, emphasizing on the proposed solutions in this document to strengthen the implementation status of international tobacco control treaties and extend the deadline of implementation of the regional strategic plan by 2025, we propose two measures as follows:

- 1- To update the present document with the latest status of the countries of the region reflected in the global Tobacco control Report in 2023,
- 2- To advocate joining other honorable ministers to the high-level group of health ministers and use the capacity of this group in gaining support for the full membership and implementation of the provisions of two international treaties on tobacco control.

Madam/Mr. chair, thank you for the floor.

**Deputy for Public Health
Ministry of Health & Medical Education
The Islamic Republic of Iran**