

In the Name of God, the Compassionate,
the Merciful

**Message from
Dr Hussein A. Gezairy
Regional Director
WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region
on the occasion of
World No Tobacco Day 2002
EMRO, Cairo, Egypt, 31 May 2002**

The dangers of tobacco, both for smokers, and non-smokers who inhale smoke produced by others, have been well documented scientifically. In 1987, the World Health Assembly established World No Tobacco Day, to take place on 31 May every year. Its aim is to discourage tobacco users from consuming tobacco, and to encourage governments, communities, groups and individuals to become aware of the problem and to take appropriate action. World No Tobacco Day has a different theme and message each year.



World No Tobacco Day 2002

This year, the World Health Organization (WHO) is celebrating World No Tobacco Day 2002 under the theme "Tobacco Free Sports." The Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has expanded upon this theme and is using the slogan "Tobacco Free Sports towards a Tobacco Free Generation." It is appropriate that the Tobacco Free World Cup kicks-off in South Korea on the same day and this will hopefully strengthen our message and contribute to a wider distribution of it.

The Tobacco Free Sports campaign was launched in Geneva, Switzerland, on 22 November 2001 at the Geneva International Conference Center, by WHO and top officials from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). At the same time, an international coalition of twelve athletes was formed, two from each region of WHO, all renowned for their sports achievements within their regions. The two athletes chosen to represent the Eastern Mediterranean Region are Mr Mahmoud El-Khatib from Egypt and Mr Imran Khan from Pakistan. This team will take forth the message that sports and tobacco do not mix.



It is well known by now that tobacco kills more than four million people every year. Between 2000 and 2030, tobacco-related diseases will cause ten million deaths. Sport, however, is about life and healthy living and it is one of the main tools in promoting both healthy lifestyle and healthy living. Unfortunately, the tobacco industry has turned sport into an advertising machine for tobacco products, taking advantage of its popularity and appeal to make tobacco use more and more attractive to the public, and to young people in particular. Tobacco use has become an "infectious" disease, through marketing, advertising, sponsorship and promotion and this has to change. Sports should in no way be associated with tobacco consumption, advertising, marketing or promotion.

Thanks to the unstinting effort of WHO and its partners the rate of sponsorship by the tobacco industry in the world is declining, but in this, the Eastern Mediterranean Region, it is on the rise. People think that tobacco money is essential for certain sports events to survive. This is untrue.



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There are good examples from all around the world which prove that sports can survive without tobacco money. For example in South Africa, cricket, which is the most popular sport there, was totally dependent on the money provided by the tobacco industry. Yet, in 1996, cricket voluntarily ended its association with tobacco and all sponsorship by the tobacco industry; cricket survived and became healthier. The real truth is that tobacco products needed sports to survive not the opposite. In the countries of this Region, the tobacco industry sponsors many sports events, such as car rallies and football matches. I hope that decision-makers in the Region will address this challenge so that we may see our sports totally free of tobacco.

We have a commitment and obligation to ourselves and to our children to help them achieve the best possible life in terms of health and opportunities and also to support them in choosing a healthy lifestyle, as well as healthy habits based on solid scientific information. Our children and future generations will not be able to make an informed decision if the notions of health and healthy living are not implanted in them at an early age. They



must be made aware of two facts: the harmful effects of tobacco, and the extent to which they are targeted by the tobacco industry.

Today, I urge each of you to take a leading role in promoting the message of World No Tobacco Day in our communities. Let us all work to make our favourite sports tobacco-free and help in creating a tobacco-free generation.

Finally, I thank Mr Mahmoud El-Khatib and Mr Imran Khan, on behalf of WHO and the Tobacco Free Initiative, for their tremendous generosity in contributing their own time and effort to promote the message of Tobacco Free Sports. They are already role models for the children of the Region in their chosen fields; now they will be role models for Tobacco Free Sports. I hope that we can all take this message forward throughout the year, not just for a day.

Mr Mahmoud El-Khatib's Statement
Thank you

the Message

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