31 May 2015 | Cairo, Egypt – On World No Tobacco Day 2015 ‘Stop illicit trade of tobacco products’

Head of the Egyptian Society for Tuberculosis and Chest Diseases and former Minister for Health, Dr Awad Tag El Din; Head of Cairo Association Against Smoking, Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases, Dr Essam El Moghazy; Head of the Tobacco Department, Ministry of Health and Population, Dr Sahar Labib; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

First of all, I would like to thank the Ministry of Health for organizing today’s event. World No Tobacco Day is one of the most important annual events in the calendar of the World Health Organization. I think we should make every day World No Tobacco Day! I am making a joke, but I am also very serious. Tobacco-related illnesses represent a global epidemic – an epidemic which WHO has been urging all its 194 Member States to fight with all their might.

We recognize the good work done by the Ministry of Health and Egypt at large as presented by Dr Sahar Labib and Dr Essam El Moghazy. Nevertheless many challenges remain in tobacco control.

Tobacco kills up to half of its users and continues to pose a real threat to public health. Nearly 6 million people die every year as a result of tobacco use, including 600 000, who are killed by the effects of exposure to second-hand smoke. Tobacco use is the main risk factor for a number of noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, lung diseases and cancer. All together these diseases are responsible for 82% of all deaths in Egypt.

Data from the 2012 STEPwise survey indicated the high prevalence of tobacco use in Egypt at all age groups. Nearly half of adult Egyptian men are smokers and recently we have also seen a worrying rise in the use of tobacco by women. Young people are particularly vulnerable with 17% of university students and 14% of students aged 13-15 using tobacco products. And now we see an even additional threat, as the rates of shisha smoking skyrocket across Egypt, with 74% of university student smokers also using shisha. We cannot afford to let this epidemic

continue and expand.

The focus of World No Tobacco Day this year is on illicit trade of tobacco products. Illicit tobacco products pose additional challenges in the fight against tobacco. They are typically sold at lower prices, thereby increasing consumption, especially to the young and poor. Moreover illicit products are untaxed and unregulated, with no health warnings, packaging or labeling.

In short, illicit tobacco trade leads to an increase in tobacco consumption rates, especially among the poor and the youth, an increase in the tobacco health burden and loss of government revenues.

A national study conducted in 2013 revealed that illicit cigarette trade is a major problem for Egypt. From 2009 to 2012 the illicit cigarette market doubled from 10 billion to 20 billion illicit cigarettes.

This resulted in loss of governmental revenues from tobacco tax. The revenue loss increased from less than one billion LE in 2010 to nearly 4 billion LE in 2013. This loss reverses the positive measures the government has made recently to increase tobacco taxation. Fortunately, every problem has a solution. WHO's "Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products" provides countries with guidance on political, technical and international collaboration, necessary to eliminate the illicit trade in tobacco products. This is the first protocol to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

As Egypt was one of the pioneer countries that signed and ratified the FCTC, WHO is looking forward to Egypt being among the first countries to sign this protocol. Eliminating the illicit trade in tobacco products will lower tobacco consumption, reduce tobacco related morbidity and premature deaths and increase government revenues.

WHO wants to renew attention to this long-running problem. We want to say clearly and loudly; stop illicit trade of tobacco products. And WHO is ready to support you, and to support Egypt, in this fight – now and always.

Egypt has made a lot of achievements in the field of tobacco control in the past decade: raising tobacco taxes, adding health warning on tobacco products packs, banning tobacco products ads. However, the gains that Egypt has made are compromised by this illegal process. I am therefore calling on all concerned stakeholders to work together, to fight the illicit tobacco trade.

Before closing, I want to mention one final thing. At a meeting on tobacco last year His Excellency the Minister for Health and Population stood up and made a bold statement – that all government health facilities would become smoke-free. This is indeed an important step in reducing the harm from tobacco. I implore that we see this policy enforced.

WHO stands ready to support its introduction. We hope that this policy will be further extended to other public institutions, starting with the Ministry of Health and Population!

Together let us set the right example.

Saturday 12th of October 2024 06:27:18 AM