



Wednesday, 13 June 2019 – The Iraqi Ministry of Health and WHO country office celebrated World No Tobacco Day with the launch of a national campaign to increase taxes on tobacco products in Iraq and endorse the revised tobacco law.

The event was meant to raise awareness of the mechanisms and plans consistent with Law No. (19) of 2012 to respond to MPOWER requirements. MPOWER measures are intended to assist in the country-level implementation of effective interventions to reduce the demand for tobacco, as ratified by WHO’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – which includes banning smoking in public place, protecting citizens and the community from the use of tobacco products and decreasing morbidity and mortality from tobacco-related causes, which align also with target 3A of Sustainable Development Goal 3.

Dr Ali Akbar, the Chief Technical Official at WHO Iraq, said that WHO worked on highlighting the dangers of tobacco both to smokers and the people around them. He delivered a message by WHO Regional Director Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, who said: “Tobacco use in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is alarming. In some countries, as many as 57% of men and 29% of women smoke. Smoking among young people is particularly worrying, reaching 42% in boys and 31% in girls. By 2025, smoking is expected to rise in this Region, contrary to the trend in the rest of the world. This will lead to an escalating epidemic of lung disease regionally.”

Drawing attention to the slogan “Don’t let tobacco take your breath or life away”, Dr Akbar called upon decision-makers in Iraq to enforce the law in order to reduce smoking, provide treatment for smokers and raise awareness through media channels and other platforms.

Senior Ministry officials confirmed that the Ministry would coordinate with other ministries and competent authorities to achieve the objectives of the law, the design of educational curricula and the establishment of awareness programmes, as well as encouraging farmers to grow crops useful to citizens instead of tobacco.

Under the slogan "Your law protects us", campaigners called upon decision-makers to hold accountable smokers inside institutions, ministries, public places, airports, classrooms, theatres, etc. and to raise awareness to protect people’s health and safety.

The event was attended by the Technical Deputy Minister of Health and Environment, President of Iraqi Doctors Syndicate, President of the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, Director of Tobacco Control at the Department of Public Health, specialists of the Ministry of Health and various civil society organizations and media channels. The ceremony also included speeches by key attendees, a video presentation on the dangers of smoking. Ministries of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research participated in the event through a clinical theatre show and songs.

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