

Cairo, Egypt, 18 May, 2017 — On this World No Tobacco Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on governments, partners, communities and individuals to stop using tobacco and drive sustainable development. The slogan for this year's Day is "Say no to tobacco". Tobacco control can protect health, reduce poverty and promote development.

Each year, more than 7 million people die from tobacco use. This figure includes the 900 000 that die from exposure to secondhand smoke. Over 80% of these deaths occur in low- or middle-income countries. These countries bear almost 40% of the global economic cost of smoking from health expenditures and lost productivity, estimated at over US\$ 1.4 trillion.

In some countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, smoking can be as high as 52% among men and 22% among women. Data for young boys and girls are equally alarming. Smoking can reach 42% among boys and 31% among girls. Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, says, "We can beat tobacco by implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), and adopting the MPOWER measures to reduce demand for this deadly product. The comprehensive implementation of the WHO FCTC and the MPOWER measures to reduce tobacco use in the Region would lead to a reduction in tobacco use ranging from 20% to 40% in 5 years and, in some countries, by up to 36% in 5 years, and 56% in 15 years."

Tobacco damages more than health

Tobacco use has devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences. It is a major barrier to sustainable development. Tobacco use impacts health, poverty, global hunger, education, economic growth, gender equality, the environment, finance and governance.

Tobacco impacts health. Tobacco damages health and causes illnesses and premature death, which leads to increased health care costs and lost productivity.

- Tobacco impacts women and children. The tobacco industry employs concepts and images that appeal to women. They also endanger women and children through growing and producing tobacco, which often involves hazardous chemicals. Additionally, the tobacco industry relies heavily on children, meaning many of them miss out on school because they are working in tobacco fields. Furthermore, both groups are at risk of dying from secondhand tobacco smoke – about half of the world's children and women are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke.

- Tobacco impacts poverty and hunger. Poor people are more likely to use tobacco. Using tobacco affects health and causes illnesses, which leads to poverty for people suffering from these illnesses, as well as their families because they have to spend on health care. Moreover, growing tobacco uses agricultural land that could have otherwise been used to grow food, which causes undernutrition.

- Tobacco impacts the environment. The tobacco industry harms the environment. Pesticides, growth regulators, and chemical fertilizers are heavily used in tobacco farming, which cause environmental health problems. Moreover, cigarette consumption pollutes the air and produces tonnes of tobacco waste, which contains over 7000 toxic chemicals, including cancer-causing compounds. Tobacco growing also contributes to deforestation, which can contribute to climate change – one tree is lost for every 300 cigarettes produced. Additionally, cigarette butts litter the environment, and are toxic to aquatic life.

Stop tobacco, save lives

“Tobacco control saves lives and reduces health inequalities,” urges Dr Fikri. It can also break the cycle of poverty, contribute to ending hunger, promote sustainable agriculture and economic growth, and combat climate change.

- Governments should strengthen implementation of the WHO FCTC and MPOWER measures to reduce tobacco use.

- Countries and civil society should combat tobacco industry interference in political processes, in turn leading to stronger national tobacco control action.

- Public and partners should participate in national, regional and global efforts to develop and implement development strategies and plans and achieve goals that prioritize action on tobacco control.

- Individuals should contribute to making a sustainable, tobacco-free world, either by committing to never taking up tobacco products, or by quitting the habit.

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