

Only 5.4% of the world's population is covered by comprehensive smoke-free laws by the end of 2008 – a rise from the 3.1% observed earlier in 2007 – reported the World Health Organization (WHO) today in its second Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009 launched in Istanbul.

This figure indicates that 154 million more people are no longer exposed to the harms of tobacco smoke in workplaces, restaurants, bars and other indoor public places. During 2008, seven countries implemented comprehensive smoke-free laws – Colombia, Djibouti, Guatemala, Mauritius, Panama, Turkey and Zambia – bringing the global total to 17 countries. These findings, along with many others are documented in the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009.

“Although this represents progress, the fact that more than 94% of people remain unprotected by comprehensive smoke-free laws shows that much more work needs to be done”, says WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, Dr Ala Alwan. “Urgent action is needed to protect people from the death and illness caused by exposure to tobacco smoke. There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke. Therefore, action is needed by governments to protect their people”, Dr Alwan said. “The WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009 is an essential resource”.

The WHO Global Tobacco Epidemic Report, 2009 devotes particular attention to Article 8 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which addresses protection from exposure to tobacco smoke. WHO chose smoke-free environments as the focus of this Report because of the irrefutable harm caused by second-hand smoke, which results in nearly 600 000 premature deaths per year along with countless debilitating illnesses and economic losses in tens of

billions of dollars. The Report also describes countries' efforts to implement the tobacco control package known as MPOWER, which WHO introduced in 2008 to help countries implement some of the demand reduction measures in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its guidelines. The Report provides a tool to see where evidence-based demand reduction interventions have been implemented and where more progress is needed. It gives country-by-country tobacco use prevalence figures as well as data about cigarette taxation, bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, support for treatment of tobacco dependence, enforcement of tobacco-free laws and monitoring of the epidemic. The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is currently working on the Arabic version of the Report, which will be launched early next year.

In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, countries are making good progress in tobacco control. Eight countries currently have a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising: Djibouti, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. As well, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan have now implemented pictorial health warnings on cigarette packaging. Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are in the process of revising their specifications for warnings, and it is expected that pictorial health warnings will be a requirement in all GCC countries very soon.

To support countries of the Region in tobacco control, the Regional Office has developed generic tobacco control legislation that addresses all the MPOWER components and other elements of tobacco control as reflected in the Framework Convention. This model legislation has been made available to countries to aid them in drafting their own country-specific laws. In addition, countries have been trained on implementation of 100% smoke-free legislation and comprehensive bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship. The Regional Office, in collaboration with the International Institute of Public Health, also developed a training module to be used at national level for developing policies on tobacco-free public places.

Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, is urging governments to take note of their national obligations under the Framework Convention and develop effective tobacco control policies. “There is a need to have uniform tobacco control policies across the region if we are to save our peoples from the harms of tobacco”, he commented. “This Report gives direction for countries in taking immediate steps to harmonize tobacco control measures and ensure strict implementation of evidence-based policies throughout the Region”.

Tobacco use continues to be the leading preventable cause of death, killing more than 5 million people per year. Unless urgent action is taken to control the tobacco epidemic, the annual death toll could rise to 8 million by 2030, the report states. More than 80% of those premature deaths will occur in low-income and middle-income countries – in other words, precisely where it is hardest to deflect and to bear such tremendous losses.

For more information, please visit:

WHO Tobacco Free Initiative, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean: www.emro.who.int/tfi/tfi.htm

WHO Tobacco Free Initiative, WHO headquarters: www.who.int/topics/tobacco

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