

Cairo, 29 May, 2013 - The Global Youth Tobacco Survey found high levels of exposure in the Eastern Mediterranean Region to advertising on billboards and in newspapers and magazines. These findings show that tobacco advertising and promotion continue to be actively present, even though they are completely banned under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which has been signed and endorsed by virtually all countries around the world.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control can curb the tobacco epidemic. Article 13 of this Convention is specific to banning all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. This is the theme of this year's World No Tobacco Day, which is being celebrated under the slogan: "Are you being manipulated? Ban tobacco advertising, promoting and sponsorship".

Countries that are Party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control have an obligation to ban all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and to adopt additional measures that counter tobacco use and marketing, exposure to secondhand smoke and numerous other activities. However, with the tobacco industry circumventing the articles of the Convention, full implementation can often be derailed and efforts to protect the public from the dangers associated with tobacco – which kills nearly 6 million people every year – hindered.

Tobacco use is rapidly increasing in low-income and middle-income countries as the tobacco industry switches its activities to target the developing world. By 2030, more than 80% of the preventable deaths associated with tobacco will be among people living in these countries, including countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

As per Article 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Parties are obliged to adopt and implement the needed measures to ban all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship to protect the public from the tobacco industry's marketing activities.

"Evidence shows that comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship help reduce tobacco use," says Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. "They prevent non-users from starting, in particular young people, and help users to quit. Partial bans are ineffective. As such, the tobacco industry diverts its marketing activities and works around legal restrictions. Governments and organizations must counter the deceptive and misleading tobacco industry tactics that undermine tobacco control activities."

Some of the deceptive and misleading tactics used by the tobacco industry include:

promotional activities at points of sale, such as discounts and free gifts which motivate impulsive purchasing decisions

the use of attractive packaging and labelling of tobacco products to draw in consumers

brand stretching

product placement on television programmes, films and games (on the internet or computer)

using celebrities to endorse tobacco brands

sponsoring sports, music and cultural events.

“Our core message on this World No Tobacco Day,” says Dr Alwan “is for governments, parliamentarians and civil society to comprehensively ban all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and to counter the tobacco industry’s efforts to undermine tobacco control.”

Since its entry into force in 2005, 19 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have adopted new legislation in an effort to meet their obligations under the Convention. Yet only six countries of the Region are fully protected from exposure to the tobacco industry advertising, promotion and sponsorship tactics.

This weak enforcement of laws and the delay in responding to the new and fast-growing

non-traditional media, such as social networks – which are difficult to regulate – has opened up a new window of opportunity for the tobacco industry to further promote its deadly products.

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