



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**

**DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**  
to the  
**WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY**  
**Cairo, Egypt, 31 May 2007**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tobacco is the second major cause of death in the world. It is well known that half the people who smoke regularly today – about 650 million people – will eventually be killed by tobacco. Equally alarming is the fact that hundreds of thousands of people who have never smoked die each year from diseases caused by breathing second-hand tobacco smoke.

This year's World No Tobacco Day focuses on 100% smoke-free environments as the only effective measure to protect the public – including women and children, and people at their workplaces – from exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.

In a growing number of countries, the norm has already changed: smoking used to be allowed practically everywhere; now many places are 100% smoke-free. In March 2004, Ireland was the first nation in the world to create and enjoy smoke-free indoor workplaces and public places, including restaurants, bars and pubs. Moreover, large parts of Canada and the United States of America have been made smoke-free through provincial or state legislation; 80% of Canadians and 50% of US residents now live in a jurisdiction where all public and workplaces are smoke-free, including bars and restaurants.

Following in their footsteps, countries around the world are taking important steps to bring in or extend legislation to make all indoor public places and workplaces smoke-free. Examples of such countries include: Norway, New Zealand, Italy Uruguay, Spain, Guinea, Mauritius, Niger, Uganda, England, Australia, Singapore and China, Hong Kong SAR.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the Yemeni parliament has approved legislation that supports a partial ban on smoking in public places and workplaces, with designated areas for smokers; Egypt, Lebanon and Oman have submitted proposals to their parliaments to enact smoke-free legislation; and Pakistan is in the process of drafting legislation that supports the banning of smoking in closed public places and workplaces.

Evidence accumulated over the past 50 years shows that breathing secondhand smoke is hazardous to health. It is known to cause cancer, heart disease and many serious respiratory and cardiovascular diseases in children and adults. It has been proved that there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke, regardless of the ventilation and/or filtration used. Statistics have shown that 700 million children – which represents almost half of the world's children – breathe air polluted by tobacco smoke, particularly at home. Results from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey show that 43.9% of students aged 13–15 years old are exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke at home while 55.8% are exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke in public places and 76.1% support smoking bans in public places.

Evaluation reports show that comprehensive smoke-free laws improve health, reduce tobacco consumption, are popular with both non-smokers and smokers and have no negative economic impact on the hospitality sector. The benefits of smoke-free places are undeniable, and the movement to smoke-free environments is growing with unstoppable momentum. Public health sectors, nongovernmental organizations and other civil society representatives, policy-makers, governments and the general public are raising their voices together to ensure workers and the public are protected from exposure to second-hand smoke, by creating and enjoying 100% smoke-free environments.

You can keep this momentum building by strengthening implementation of existing legislation to protect health and by helping make the population more aware of the dangers of exposure to second-hand smoke.