

EMRO press release
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Tobacco- Free Youth World No tobacco Day theme for 2008

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean urges governments to take immediate action to stop young people falling prey to the deadly tobacco addiction. Thousands of young people around the world continue to take up smoking and other smokeless tobacco products, being entrapped by the tobacco industry's targeted campaigns on behalf of deadly product. This year's World No Tobacco Day theme is "Tobacco-Free Youth" and calls for breaking of the marketing net of the tobacco industry which lures young people, especially, through sponsorship, advertising and glamorization of tobacco.

To commemorate this day WHO is holding World No Tobacco Day activities in all its Member States and at the Regional Office from 31 May to 6 June 2008. The regional celebration will be inaugurated by the WHO Regional Director, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, in the holy city of Medina, and the event will be marked by the announcement of Mecca and Medina, the most sacred cities for Muslims, as Tobacco Free cities. A "Youth Against Tobacco" march will take place in front of the regional office in Cairo on 3 June. It will be attended by a large number of young people, including scouts, youth organizations, non-governmental organizations working on tobacco control, celebrities and media personnel. The highlight of the event will be a symbolic "Breaking the Net" activity in which the young people participating will cut open a huge net representing the marketing net of the tobacco industry.

World No Tobacco Day is also an occasion to acknowledge the valuable support of WHO's partners in fighting the menace of tobacco, WHO has award to a number of organizations and individuals in recognition of their invaluable efforts against tobacco in their countries. This year's World No Tobacco Day award winners from the Eastern Mediterranean Region include the Anti-Smoking Society of Bahrain and the Lalla Salma Association Against Cancer of Morocco. Among the individuals, Mrs Nadine Kayrouz El Krab of Lebanon, Dr Ahmed Abd El Rahman Mohamed, Head

of the International Friendship Council of Sudan and Mrs Raoudha Kaabi, Director of Menzah College, Tunisia have been honoured with the award in recognition of their services in tobacco control.

Dr Hussein A Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean has stressed the urgent need for countries to ban all forms of direct and indirect advertising by the tobacco industry. “The tobacco industry is after young people, the new fuel for their profits and markets”, he remarked in his message to mark the occasion of World No Tobacco Day. “They know that today’s teenager is tomorrow’s potential regular customer. They have studied smoking behaviour among youth in detail and they use this to develop and market their products”.

Globally, most people start smoking before the age of 18, with almost a quarter of those beginning before the age of 10. The younger children are when they first try smoking, the more likely they are to become regular tobacco users and the less likely they are to quit.

A strong link between advertising and smoking in young people has been proven. The more aware and appreciative young people are of tobacco advertising; the more likely they are to smoke or say they intend to. As a result, the tobacco industry spends billions of dollars worldwide each year spreading its marketing net as widely as possible to attract young customers. Tobacco companies market their products wherever youth can be easily accessed in the cinema, on the internet, in fashion magazines, and at concerts and sports events.

The evidence shows that only comprehensive bans are effective in reducing tobacco consumption. Partial bans have little or no impact, as the tobacco industry finds ways to evade them and reach its target population. Results from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey in the Eastern Mediterranean Region reveal that 17% of youth are susceptible to start smoking the following year; 9% were ever offered a free cigarette by a tobacco company representative and 14.5% had an object with a cigarette logo on it. These findings suggest that the tobacco industry is constantly on the alert with its advertising making use of non-restrictive media to retain its visibility among youth.

Organizations, institutions and communities in the Member States are urged to use this opportunity to involve young people in their activities so they can be part of the campaign against tobacco and are engaged in the conception, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of tobacco control policies and programmes to ban advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products.

Activities like marches, scout camps, seminars and youth forums can be planned to raise awareness of the deadly health consequences of tobacco use and of exposure to second-hand smoke.