



**70th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe**  
**Written statement by the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control**

Provisional agenda items 2(b) and 6

The Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) welcomes the report of the Regional Director as well as the Mid-term evaluation of implementation of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the WHO European Region 2016-2025. We have noted with concern that many of the restrictive measures enacted to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have had negative impacts not only on noncommunicable diseases (NCD) risk factors such as tobacco consumption but also on the continuity of NCD-related health services and prevention programmes.

The inclusion of strengthening the implementation of the WHO FCTC as Target 3.a of the SDGs recognizes that tobacco control is indispensable to sustainable development. In addition, in October 2018, the Conference of the Parties adopted the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control 2019-2025, which calls upon all relevant stakeholders to intensify efforts to work together to support implementation and accelerate action of the WHO FCTC by its Parties.

While acknowledging that much more needs to be done to ensure full implementation of the WHO FCTC, we are very pleased to note the significant progress made by Member States in Europe in enacting new tobacco control policies especially in relation to increasing tobacco excise taxes, plain packaging of tobacco products and evidence-informed action related to novel tobacco products.

We also concur that there needs to be a greater focus on gender-sensitive approaches and would like to draw your attention to the decision of the Conference of the Parties FCTC/COP7(12)<sup>1</sup> on addressing gender-specific risks when developing tobacco control strategies.

We would like to highlight to Member States that tobacco control remains crucial during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As per WHO's report on *Maintaining essential health services: operational guidance for the COVID-19 context*, sustaining population-level interventions for tobacco control during the COVID-19 pandemic is vital.

COVID-19 fatalities are higher among people with pre-existing conditions including NCDs and tobacco use is the main common risk factor linked to these diseases. A scientific brief published by WHO in June 2020 states that, the available evidence suggests that smoking is associated

---

<sup>1</sup> See: [https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC\\_COP7\\_12\\_EN.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC_COP7_12_EN.pdf?ua=1)

with increased severity of disease and death in hospitalized COVID-19 patients.<sup>1</sup> Given the link between tobacco use and COVID-19, any recovery plan should be aligned with the WHO FCTC.

In line with the above-mentioned WHO guidance for the COVID-19 context and with the WHO FCTC we urge countries to:

- Continue the good efforts made in increasing tobacco taxes, plain packaging and regulation of novel tobacco products including nicotine-containing products;
- Provide help with tobacco cessation: there has not been a better moment to quit tobacco and countries should step up implementation of Article 14 of the WHO FCTC during this time; and
- Counteract the interference of the tobacco industry and its front groups especially: we cannot allow the vector of the tobacco epidemic to interfere in public health matters.

We urge countries to relentlessly continue their efforts to curb the tobacco epidemic through targeted policy, legislative and regulatory measures and call on Member States that are not yet Party to the WHO FCTC to become Party. The Convention Secretariat stands ready to work with the WHO Regional Office for Europe to support countries in the Region.

Lastly, we call on all Parties to the WHO FCTC to also become Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. The Protocol is an international treaty with the objective of eliminating all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products through a package of measures to be taken by countries acting in cooperation with each other.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/smoking-and-covid-19>.