Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Greetings from Geneva. I am pleased to address this fourth session of the Conference of the Parties and regret that I cannot be with you because of previous commitments.

The marketing of tobacco products is the kind of pervasive and devious threat where true protection depends on collective action.

Support for the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control continues to grow. As this Conference opens, we can count 171 Parties that have ratified the treaty.

I am personally proud of this rapid and wide acceptance. Our job now is to ensure that the Framework Convention is used to maximum effect.

Full implementation of the Framework Convention will be the greatest single contribution to preventive medicine in this century. I can say this with confidence. The evidence of the vast damage done by tobacco products, in all their forms, including environmental smoke, continues to grow.

During this session, you will be reviewing progress in implementing the Framework Convention, within individual countries and globally.

Five years on, we can say: the Framework Convention is already making a difference. Some specific articles are being more readily implemented than others, and progress is uneven around the world. But progress is definitely being made.

In fact, striking progress has been made in countries with a range of different political settings and economic resources. This tells us that implementation is entirely feasible, in any country.
Countries, with the best of will and good intentions, face obstacles. Unquestionably, the biggest obstacle is fierce opposition from the tobacco industry.

This is an epic battle between the protection of public health and the pursuit of corporate wealth. This is a ruthless pursuit of wealth, with no regard for the damage tobacco products cause to health.

Protecting public health policy from interference by the tobacco industry is a cornerstone of the Framework Convention and vital to its implementation.

Public health has the evidence and the right values on its side. The tobacco industry has vast financial resources, lawyers, lobbyists, and no values whatsoever beyond the profit motive.

The tobacco industry is an old dog with new tricks. Its behaviour has changed.

Efforts to subvert the Framework Convention have always been elaborate, sophisticated, and above all very well financed.

In the past, these efforts have been covert and largely invisible. Not anymore.

Today, the attack against the treaty is out in the open. Big Tobacco is throwing its resources and its power into efforts to defeat legislation or delay it as long as possible. Lawsuits are being filed to nullify parts of legislation.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is unquestionably the best instrument for resisting these efforts. Properly implemented, backed by strong national legislation and enforcement, it has the power to force the tobacco industry into retreat.

Rest assured: WHO is always ready to extend technical support.

Implementation of the treaty benefits greatly from support by a large number of intergovernmental partners and nongovernmental organizations. I know you are present here as observers. In other settings, you are highly vocal anti-tobacco activists. This support is needed, and appreciated.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The WHO Framework Convention, in letter and spirit, calls upon Parties to go beyond the baseline of obligations required by the treaty. I challenge you to do so, and wish you a most productive conference.