

Portugal

World Health Organization

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Item 3 Address by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General

Mr President of the World Health Assembly,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to address this Assembly on behalf of Portugal. We align with the previous statement made by European Union.

This year we celebrate three-quarters of a century of the World Health Organization (WHO). During this time, WHO has played a vital role in leading global health and responding to unprecedented challenges, like the COVID-19 pandemic. As we reflect on this crisis, it is essential to emphasize the importance of Universal Health Coverage and widely accessible primary health care.

For the last 50 years, we aimed to achieve more resilient health systems, focused on disease prevention and health promotion. This focus paves the way for meaningful health policies that improve the health of populations.

Twenty years ago, WHO launched the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was adopted by Portugal in 2005. This was an historical step to commit 182 countries to save millions of lives worldwide, protecting populations from tobacco smoke. During the last decades, many global health leaders were brave enough to stand against tobacco use and inspire us to follow them. Time showed they were right.

Two weeks ago, the Portuguese government presented a proposal to strengthen the current law on tobacco control measures. We aim to reach a smoke free generation. Even with compelling evidence on the effects of smoke-free policies and the distance already covered on the matter, the proposal was received with resistance from different sectors.

When endorsing tobacco-free policies, WHO is playing a critical role and supporting implementation at the national level. Thank you, Mr Director-General, for addressing this issue yesterday in your speech: tobacco, as a global threat, needs global response. You can count on our commitment towards a tobacco-free world.

Like it happened with tobacco control, we need to come together and commit to equally impactful decisions on the health of the populations. The pandemic accord we are negotiating must be the historic agreement to make the next paradigm shift in global health security.

Thank you.