



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

**Address by**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY**

**Cairo, Egypt, 3 June 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“The tobacco industry catches you young...break the tobacco marketing net”. With this message WHO is celebrating WNTD 2008. Tobacco is well known to be a deadly product that kills half of its consumers. Still the tobacco industry is actively involved in marketing it, and in promoting the different ways of using it. Above all, the tobacco industry is after young people, the new fuel for their profits and markets.

Young people are a strategic target for the tobacco industry. Despite its continued denial and despite its involvement in youth-related preventive campaigns under the banner of corporate social responsibility, numerous tobacco industry documents reveal that tobacco companies perceive youth as a key market to survive and find lifetime customers. 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. Their own reports say that; “...Younger adult smokers are the only source of replacement smokers...If younger adults turn away from smoking, the industry must decline, just as a population which does not give birth will eventually dwindle”.

Recognizing this approach by the industry, it is my pleasure to announce that WHO has reproduced all its inquiries on the tobacco industry activities in our region in a more user friendly production that is available today in the English language and will also be available in Arabic very soon.

WHO was, and still is, committed to controlling the death toll that is a direct result of tobacco use at all possible levels—international, regional and national. In this connection strengthening partnership is a key message, while involving youth directly in our activities and campaigns is also a vital mechanism to overcome the challenge and to pass on the message to the future generation.

It is proven that young people are fully aware of the magnitude of the problem and at the same time are willing to quit the habit. The results of the Global Youth Tobacco Survey reveal that more than two thirds of young smokers would like to quit, and overall more than 80% of youth are very supportive of tobacco-free public places. In World No Tobacco Day we reach out to them, giving them a helping hand to come on board and stop this deadly behaviour.

But are we helping them enough? The Global Youth Tobacco Survey tells us that 38.3 % are exposed to tobacco use and second-hand smoke in their homes, while the community is also not in full compliance with the existing regulations. Even in countries where there is a ban on tobacco use in public places, it was reported that 45.7 % are exposed to second-hand smoke in public places. As we all know the Global Youth Tobacco Survey focuses on youth of 13-15 years old. This raises the question about other age groups and what kind of temptation they are exposed to when it comes to the wide social acceptance of tobacco use.

Realizing the importance of youth, all the recommended strategies that WHO is fostering are aimed at consumption reduction at this critical phase of life (adolescence). Both the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the newly released MPOWER reports call upon governments to raise the price of tobacco products to make the product less affordable to young people; to ban advertising and all promotional activities comprehensively, to reduce the temptation; to ban tobacco use in all public places completely which will automatically reduce the health risks; to restrict the sales of tobacco use to minors in order to limit accessibility; and to make cessation services providing medical and counselling assistance for people desiring to quit tobacco use, both affordable and accessible

These are all known to be successful measures to reduce consumption and to change social acceptance. I stress again the need to implement these measure in our Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We draw on your support to combat the tobacco epidemic. We depend on the successful network that exists now in countries of the Region to make tobacco control a success story, as in other Regions. We are seeing change—including positive change in the countries on the political front. I am hopeful that more positive progress will occur at the population level as well.

I end my message by wishing you a successful celebration of World No Tobacco Day. Let us analyse our failures and turn it into lessons learnt. Let us celebrate our successes. Let us make it an occasion beyond the day ... let us make it a life time celebration for a world free of tobacco.