



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message of

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to the

**EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING
ON THE PROTOCOL ON ILLICIT TRADE IN TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 12–13 May 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to welcome you all to this Regional Consultative Meeting on the Protocol on Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. Allow me first to thank the Secretariat of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) for sparing no efforts in organizing this meeting just prior to the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) which is negotiating the protocol. Their commitment and hard work are much appreciated by the Regional Office. At the same time I have to thank our colleagues in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education for hosting this meeting. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always taken the lead in tobacco control in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and we are proud of our continued collaboration in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Under the leadership of the former Director-General of WHO, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, the first seeds of an internationally agreed upon convention for tobacco control were planted in public health. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was adopted, by consensus, by the World Health Assembly in 2003. This quickly turned into a global movement and nonstop efforts to control tobacco, which have continued under the umbrella of the FCTC.

The Parties to the FCTC have moved ahead in many areas, including the adoption of guidelines on protection from exposure to tobacco smoke, guidelines on packaging and labelling, and guidelines on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. Most important was the decision of the Conference of Parties (decision FCTC/COP2 (12) at its second session in July 2007 that established the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body to negotiate a protocol on illicit trade in tobacco products and it is for this that we are here today, to negotiate at the regional level prior to moving to the international level negotiations.

The illicit trade in tobacco products has always been one of the major pathways to make tobacco products accessible to a large sector of the population across the world. The Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region are not spared in this. Illicit tobacco products represent an epidemic in many of the countries of the Region. The available evidence suggests that for decades the Region has been an important sanctuary for smuggled tobacco and has provided an important trade route for movement of illicit tobacco products. Some countries have been used as gateways to spread smuggled tobacco throughout the Region, with advantage taken of the status of the Region in international business, and of porous borders. There are also countries in the Region that have been used unchallenged as a home for the illicit production of tobacco. This is a complex problem that has no borders; and a challenge that needs to be fought by the countries as a combined force.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region holds an important position in terms of legitimate international trade. Because of the specific geo-political situation of the Region, many countries provide the hub for a major proportion of legitimate international trade. The illegitimate sector also takes advantage of this situation. As we move into the third session of the INB to draft the international protocol on illicit trade in tobacco products in the coming days, it is very important for the Member States of the Region to sit together and devise strategies to be included in the protocol based on the common challenges faced by the Region. We must recognize that this is a fight against a very well organised adversary and that only strong policies that are applied universally across national borders can help us to eliminate smuggling.

The negotiation of this protocol is also an opportunity for governments to engage with other sectors—border security agencies, customs departments and all the other authorities within the national systems that have a role in combating smuggling and illicit trade. This is also an

important avenue which neighbouring and other countries of the Region must explore in order to work with maximum collaboration and commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Finally, I would like to urge all the participants of this important consultative meeting to make best use of the time to clarify and develop a regional position on the various articles proposed in the draft protocol to be taken forward to the plenary of the INB. We can move forward in preventing the illicit trade in tobacco products only with commitment and collaboration. Again, my deep gratitude and thanks to Ministry of Health and Medical Education and to the Framework Convention Secretariat who have worked so hard to facilitate our gathering today.

Thank you.