

Media Statement

For immediate release

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**International Union Against
Tuberculosis and Lung Disease**
Health solutions for the poor

An innovative new tool to assess the sustainability of national tobacco control programmes launched by The Union

Thursday, 3 November 2016 (Edinburgh, UK) – The [Index of Tobacco Control Sustainability \(ITCS\)](#) has been launched by the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) to assist countries to assess and guide national tobacco control programmes to become sustainable. It is the first tool of its kind. A first round of Index assessments – from 24 countries with the highest burden of tobacco use – have been published alongside the ITCS.

The Index comprises 31 indicators that identify which structures, policies and resources a country has in place for sustainable tobacco control. The indicators encompass a range of key infrastructures: national laws, financial mechanisms, human resource and capacity-building, and measures to insulate public health policy against tobacco industry interference. The Index was developed by the authors of a paper published in BMJ's Tobacco Control journal earlier this year: *Index of Tobacco Control Sustainability (ITCS): A Tool to Measure the Sustainability of National Tobacco Control Programmes (Jackson-Morris & Latif, 2016)*.

'We designed the Index to give countries a clear insight into how well their tobacco control programmes are structured for future impact and resilience. An assessment identifies areas of strength and importantly, highlights infrastructural gaps,' said Dr Jackson-Morris, co-author and Head of the Grants Programme for tobacco control at The Union. 'Completing an assessment gives those leading national tobacco control programmes a clear baseline from which they can prioritise future work. It should be viewed as a snapshot in time; a benchmarking tool to track progress towards sustainability.'

The ITCS was developed by tobacco control experts at The Union to complement the established processes and supports of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) – the world's only legally-binding international health treaty. The WHO FCTC now has 180 countries committed to implementing measures proven to reduce tobacco use and the devastation it causes. Tobacco use remains the greatest preventable cause of premature death worldwide: it kills more than six million people each year, two-thirds of whom live in low and middle income countries.

'We hope the Index will mobilise countries to press on with urgency to achieve the goals they have agreed under the WHO FCTC. Over the last decade huge progress has been made to curb the tobacco epidemic worldwide. But the job is very far from complete,' said Dr Ehsan Latif, co-author and Director of The Union's Department of Tobacco Control. 'The first round of assessments were encouraging, in that the two nations that achieved sustainability have low and middle income economies. This shows that with political commitment and coordination this vital part of the public health agenda can be secured into the future. It is not dependent on financial resource alone.'

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand both achieved the sustainability threshold. Ten countries were designated as 'progressing' on sustainability, and 12 countries were in the low category. The first round of assessments also identified infrastructural gaps common to many of the 24 countries, for example, no country had adequate policies in place to protect against tobacco industry interference. Such findings will be useful both to help individual countries, and the civil society organisations supporting governments in this work, to prioritise and plan strategically.

In support of the ITCS, head of the WHO FCTC Secretariat, Dr Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva said: 'I urge countries to consider the Union's Index as a useful tool in their implementation process, and to wholeheartedly take up the challenges it will help pinpoint.'

The Union's Department of Tobacco Control was well placed to develop this tool, having co-managed the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use grants programme for the last ten years. To date The Union has worked with governments and civil society in 43 countries to help introduce and implement measures proven to reduce tobacco use. Countries wishing to complete an assessment should contact the department: tobaccofreeunion@theunion.org

Access the ITCS and 24 country assessment here:

http://www.tobaccofreeunion.org/images/Index_of_Tobacco_Control_Sustainability_24_Country_Assessments_2016.pdf

About the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)

Since its founding as a global scientific organisation in 1920, The Union has drawn from the best evidence and expertise to advance solutions to public health challenges affecting people living in poverty. The Union is currently progressing solutions for tuberculosis, HIV, tobacco-related diseases and other lung and non-communicable diseases. With close to 17,000 members active in more than 140 countries, The Union has its headquarters in Paris and 11 offices in Africa, the Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America and South-East Asia. For more information on The Union's tobacco control work please visit www.tobaccofreeunion.org.

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