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WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY: 31 MAY 2011

The Union works with more than 30 countries to implement tobacco control treaty

Paris, 30 May 2011 - More than 30 of the world's heaviest tobacco-using countries have advanced towards fulfilling their commitments under the World Health Organization – Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO–FCTC) with technical assistance, training and other support from the **International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)**. This year's World No Tobacco Day on 31 May 2011 highlights the importance of efforts to implement the FCTC, the world's first international public health treaty.

"173 countries are now Parties to the FCTC, and that is a major achievement for public health that was almost unimaginable a decade ago", says Dr Nils E Billo, Executive Director of The Union. "Implementation is the next big hurdle, though, and each country must cross it if we are truly committed to preventing the millions of deaths caused by tobacco-related diseases each year."

The Union supports countries with the highest smoking rates, such as China, to meet the obligations laid down by the treaty, which range from passing smokefree legislation and raising tobacco taxes to warning people about the dangers of second-hand smoke. Through a grants programme funded by the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use, The Union and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids have provided approximately US \$77 million in support for 349 tobacco control projects in over 52 countries since 2006. The grants are given to government agencies, tobacco control organisations, universities and other groups for projects that develop and deliver high-impact, evidence-based interventions. In addition, The Union provides capacity building and technical and management training to equip grantees with the knowledge and skills to tackle tobacco control and put the issue on the public health agenda in their respective countries.

"We focus on the countries where tobacco use is highest, and they each face different obstacles", says Ehsan Latif, Director of The Union's Department of Tobacco Control. "For some, it might be a cultural tradition of using tobacco; for others, it might be an economic dependence on tobacco growing. Consequently, every obstacle overcome is to be celebrated, no matter how big or small."

The urgency of this campaign is compounded by the fact that tobacco is a risk factor for a host of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including heart attacks and strokes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases. It jeopardises the health of millions, the highest percentage of whom live in low- and middle-income countries. It also places an unnecessary economic burden on families whose incomes are depleted not only by spending on tobacco products, but also on treatment of tobacco-related illnesses.

In April The Union participated in the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Noncommunicable Disease Control held in Moscow in advance of the UN Summit on NCDs in September. The inclusion of tobacco control issues at such a high level and within the discussion on NCDs shows how broad awareness of this issue has become – and how much stronger is the international commitment to a healthier, smokefree, future for the world.

Highlights of what has been achieved over the past five years include

- Several countries, such as Nepal, have passed legislation calling for 100% smokefree environments. Nepal's comprehensive tobacco control law, passed this year, bans the sale of tobacco products to children under the age of 18.

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- Some of the world's largest cities have gone smokefree, even if the country as a whole has not yet met that goal. Examples are Buenos Aires, Argentina, home to 13 million people, and Alexandria and Port Said in Egypt. In Indonesia, seven cities are implementing 100% local smokefree regulations, setting a trend that is slowly spreading across the country.
- In China, a country where compliance with the FCTC has been slow since it signed the treaty in 2006, there have been major improvements over the last year. Several large high-profile events have successfully gone smokefree, such as the Asian Games and the Shanghai Expo. Recently, the Chinese Government announced a regulation that bans smoking in 28 different types of public spaces.
- Increasingly, the message about the harmful effect of tobacco on people's health – and on countries' overall economies – is being heard. Legislators, as well as whole government health departments have been involved in drafting legislation, most notably in the Chinese cities of Tianjin, Shenyang, Chongqing and Harbin. Guangzhou, a city of 12 million, has now implemented one of the strictest tobacco control laws in mainland China.
- Raising the taxes on tobacco products – and thereby raising the retail price – is one of the most effective ways of reducing consumption. Late last year, the National Concept on Tobacco Control was signed by Russia's Prime Minister. This document not only includes provisions for tax increases, but also calls for 100% smokefree public places; a total ban on advertising, promotion and sponsorship; and graphic health warnings on tobacco packages.
- Mexico and Egypt have also raised taxes to encourage smokers to quit and discourage newcomers from starting. In Mexico, the taxes were raised up to 37%; and, in Egypt, taxes have gone up 40% on cigarettes and Shisha (water pipe) and 100% on smokeless tobacco.
- In India, a *Health Worker Guide* was developed and widely disseminated in several languages to assist health workers in warning patients about the effects of tobacco use on their health and to help them quit.
- Graphic health warnings have also proved an effective way to impress people with the need to quit or not start using tobacco. Many countries have now implemented these graphic health warnings. In Pakistan, pictorial health warnings now cover 40% of the back and front of tobacco packages. As part of Nepal's new tobacco control legislation, 75% of tobacco products will be covered with a pictorial health warning.
- Hospitals and health facilities set an example for the public about the harms of tobacco use. Across China 41 hospitals are now smokefree and many of their staff have quit smoking. This has reduced the consumption of tobacco in hospitals by patients and their relatives. In Krasnoyarsk, Russia, many hospitals are also going smokefree, which serves to encourage the reduction of tobacco use and to raise public awareness about its dangers.

"Each step forward is important", says Dr Billo, "and it's also important that World No Tobacco Day highlight the necessity of implementing the FCTC. Without strong tobacco control, WHO predicts the number of deaths per year will rise from 5 to 8 million by 2030. That is not a long way off."

About The Union

The mission of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) is to bring innovation, expertise, solutions and support to address health challenges in low- and middle-income populations. With nearly 10,000 members and subscribers from 152 countries, The Union has its headquarters in Paris and offices serving the Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and South-East Asia regions. Its scientific departments focus on tuberculosis and HIV, lung health and non-communicable diseases, tobacco control and research. For more information, please visit our website at www.theunion.org.

