The World Medical Association (WMA) is an international organisation representing the world's physicians. Its mission is to serve humanity, by endeavouring to achieve the highest international standards in medical education, medical science, medical art and medical ethics.

The WMA’s membership includes national medical associations in some 70 countries, across Africa, Asia, Europe, and both South and North America. The member organisation represent almost 8 million doctors who provide health care services to a significant percentage of the world’s population. Every 9 seconds throughout the world, someone dies from an illness caused by tobacco. By 2030, the death toll will more than triple, to one death every 3 seconds. Motivated by its duty to promote the highest possible standards of health for all the peoples of the world, the WMA submits evidence to these public hearings on the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control in the earnest hope that immediate action can be taken to avert this global disaster for public health.

The WMA is funded by the annual contributions of its member national medical associations.

Tobacco kills

The health effects of active tobacco use have been expensively documented in scientific papers and expert reports, and have for decades been accepted by all but the tobacco industry. Passive smoking causes lung cancer and heart disease in adults. Second-hand tobacco smoke causes lower respiratory illness, reduced lung function and middle ear disease in children. It also both causes asthma, and exacerbates the condition. Nicotine is highly addictive, and induces a drug-dependence syndrome in users.

Tobacco is one of the greatest threats to human health and safety. If current trends continue, the global death toll from tobacco will rise about 4 million per year at present to 10 million per year in 2030.

There are an estimated 1.2 billion smokers in the world today. By 2020, this number is set to rise to almost 1.7 billion. Over this period, the prevalence of smoking among adults will rise from 30% to around 35%.

The burden of the tobacco epidemic is rapidly shifting from the developed to the developing world. At present, more than 80% of all current smokers live in the developing world. By 2030, more than 70% of deaths caused by tobacco will occur in the developing world.

While tobacco use is decreasing among men in more affluent countries, it is increasing among males in most low- and middle-income countries, and among women worldwide. Moreover, in most countries, smoking rates are increasing among adolescents and young people.

Surveys in both developed and developing countries have show that most people begin smoking as children or as adolescents. It is estimated that some quarter of a billion young people alive today will eventually die as the result of using tobacco.

In the 20th century, some 100 million people throughout the world
are estimated to have dies as a result of their tobacco use. In the 21st
century, if current trends continue, this figure could reach 1 billion
deaths.

Action is urgently needed

The WMA recognises the roles and responsibilities of medical
professionals in tackling the global tobacco epidemic. WMA has therefore
called on national medical associations and on all physicians to take action
to reduce the health hazards associated with the use of tobacco products, by
adopting and publicising a policy opposing the use of tobacco products, by
participating in programs to educate the public about the harms of both
active and passive smoking, and by helping their patients to overcome
tobacco dependence.

However, the WMA recognises that tackling the global tobacco
epidemic is not just a matter for doctors and health advocates. Rather,
effective strategies to reduce the preventable illness and death caused by
tobacco require action by civil society, by national governments, and by
international bodies.

Public policy measures to curb tobacco use must be backed by
national legislation, and adherence to their provisions both monitored and
enforced.

There is broad international consensus on to the elements of
effective tobacco control policy. The World Bank has concluded that a
comprehensive strategy to curb the tobacco epidemic would include increasing
taxes, adding prominent health warning labels to tobacco products, adopting
comprehensive bans on advertising and promotion, and restricting smoking in
workplaces and public places.

Recognising the need for effective tobacco control legislation, the
WMA has urged its members to support the enactment and enforcement of laws
that require effective health warnings on all tobacco products, limit
smoking in public places, limit advertising and sales of tobacco, prohibit
tax-free tobacco sales, and increase tobacco taxation.

The transnational tobacco industry

The global tobacco epidemic is shaped by the activities of
powerful commercial interests in the form of transnational tobacco
companies. Sensible action to tackle the tobacco pandemic therefore requires
effective measures to regulate their international activities.

The global trade in tobacco is controlled by a handful of
corporations, largely multinational companies based in the USA, UK and
Japan. As tobacco sales in the industrialized world fall, transnational
tobacco companies are looking to new markets. Since the 1960s, these
corporations have targeted new markets in Latin America, Asia, Africa,
Eastern Europe and China. Between 1970 and 1990, per capita consumption of
tobacco fell 10% in developed countries, but increased 64% in developing
countries.

Transnational forces - such as global marketing and communications,
and trade liberalization - have facilitated the global spread of the tobacco
trade. For example:
Global marketing and communications through global broadcast media and the internet, as well as sponsorship of international sporting and cultural events, can undermine effective national restrictions. The tobacco industry operates in a global market. Internal documents reveal how it 'plans, develops and operates its markets on a global scale', focusing on the concept of 'global brands' and the 'global smoker'.

Trade liberalization, including international, multinational and bilateral agreements, have been used to prise open new markets to tobacco products. Reduced trade barriers have been shown to increase tobacco consumption in low and middle income countries. Internal tobacco company documents show how transnational tobacco companies have actively sought to resist and undermine attempts by governments to protect the public health against tobacco.

Major international tobacco companies colluded in their denial of the evidence that smoking causes fatal and non-fatal disease, establishing an internationally coordinated network to perpetuate a false controversy around the health effects of smoking. Despite the overwhelming scientific and medical consensus that smoking causes disease, the tobacco industry has consistently withheld and denied information on the hazardous effects of its products. Only recently has it admitted that tobacco causes illness and death. However, it continues to deny the true nature and scale of the devastation caused by its products.

The tobacco industry continues to reject medical opinion regarding the addictive nature of nicotine, and seeks to cast doubt on the proven hazards of second-hand smoke by distorting the research agenda and by creating a false controversy around the issue.

In support of the WHO Framework Convention

The WMA draws attention to the indisputable evidence that tobacco cause gross damage to the health of smokers, and to research confirming the dangers of passive smoking. In a series of statements and resolutions, the WMA has recognised that tobacco products are hazardous to health and has urged physicians everywhere to declare war on tobacco.

Responsible international health policy requires meaningful regulation of the transnational tobacco industry. The World Health Organization Framework Convention for Tobacco Control will establish an internationally binding treaty designed to protect the public health against the global spread of tobacco.

The World Medical Association calls on WHO and on all Governments to ensure that at the heart the Framework Convention are measures proven to be effective in reducing the suffering and death from tobacco. The effectiveness of such measures can be gauged by their impact in reducing tobacco usage and consumption.

The transnational tobacco industry continues to deny the true scale of the devastating effects of its products, to resist the implementation of measures framed to protect the consumer, and to use its vast resources to protect profits. The evidence shows that far from working in good faith with regulatory authorities to reduce the human toll from tobacco, the industry has sought to distort and undermine the policy process at both the national and international levels.
Noting both the past behavior of the tobacco industry and its current stance, the WMA has urged medical schools, research institutions, researchers and physicians to refrain from all contact with the tobacco industry and its representatives. We appeal to the WHO and to all involved to ensure that the same approach is taken during the intergovernmental negotiations towards the Framework Conventions.

In May 1998, in a plea for action to halt the tobacco epidemic, WMA asked: How long before the world stops this universal cancer? Since then, almost 10 million more human lives have been lost to this scourge, while the tobacco industry has gained almost one thousand billion US dollars in revenue.

Decisive action is long overdue. We call on all of good faith - on individuals, opinion-leaders, civil society, Governments, international bodies and health professionals alike - to lend their active support to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Dr. Delon Human
Secretary General & CEO
The World Medical Association

The World Medical Association (WMA) is a global federation of National Medical Associations, representing the millions of physicians world-wide. Acting on behalf of physicians and patients, the WMA endeavours to achieve the highest possible standards of medical science, education, ethics and health care for all people.

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