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## **TOBACCO KILLS – DON'T BE DUPED, SAYS WHO ON WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY**

It is sold as a lifestyle, as the taste of freedom and sophistication. Children, sometimes as young as nine, are lured into the tobacco habit by aggressive advertising and marketing. Everyday, 11,000 people die due to a tobacco-related disease. Most of today's 1.2 billion smokers started before they were eighteen.

"Tobacco advertisements talk to us from our streets, films, radios, television sets and sports events. Everywhere our children and we turn, there is something or someone telling you to smoke," says WHO Director-General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland on World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), 31 May 2000. "What makes all this unacceptable and treacherous is that this dangerous and addictive product is sold to youth and adolescents as an assertion of their freedom to choose."

The Director-General's Prize for outstanding contributions to tobacco control goes this year to His Majesty the King of Thailand, who has helped to ensure that Thailand has some of the most progressive tobacco control laws in the world. Thailand, which is the venue for this year's global WNTD events, is one of a few countries that very early on understood the tobacco problem in all its dimensions – from the death and disease burden to economics, trade and public policy. On May 31, Thai children will launch a global signature campaign calling for global advertising bans.

The multi-country, multi-language "Tobacco Kills – Don't be Duped" campaign has been endorsed by celebrities such as super model Christy Turlington, international test cricketer Imran Khan, and the industry whistleblower Dr. Jeffery Wigand whose struggle was portrayed in the Hollywood movie the "Insider".

Events on May 31, focusing on the same theme, are being held in various places around the world. In Geneva, home to WHO, local authorities will lead an "animalcade" – parade of animals and children - that will make its way through the city. In California, local tobacco activists are teaming up with their counterparts from African countries to focus on the health and economic impact of tobacco. In India, the world's first Hindi website on tobacco will be formally launched, and Russian speakers will get reliable tobacco information from a website launched in

Ukraine.

With a focus this year on the entertainment and sports industries that are the prime vehicles for carrying tobacco messages around the globe for their largely young audience, the WHO seeks to make the case for a global ban on advertising and promotion of tobacco. "Our decision to focus on the entertainment, film and sports industry is a carefully thought one. It is unconventional and unorthodox, but that is precisely why we have chosen it – the tobacco industry strikes where people least suspect it to be," says Dr Brundtland.

A global advertising ban is one of the early protocols that will be negotiated by WHO's 191 Member States working on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The decision to highlight this initiative early in the FCTC process is no accident – it is a reaction to calls from the entire WHO family seeking an urgent response to a global menace.

"Protecting children and youth from tobacco is a battle with a well-financed and supremely well-organised adversary," says Dr Derek Yach, WHO Executive Director in charge of the Tobacco Free Initiative. "If we expect young people to resist tobacco use, it is essential that we provide governments with meaningful, effective alternatives to becoming accessories to tobacco promotion."

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