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Statement of the Head of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and the Protocol

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Director- General, Regional Director, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

COVID-19 has highlighted the fundamental importance of health to development, the economy and every other aspect of human life.

We are in the midst of a syndemic, in which the NCD and tobacco pandemics are interacting with COVID-19, with devastating effect.

We urge Member States to continue their efforts to curb the tobacco epidemic through targeted policy, legislative and regulatory measures.

Tobacco control is fundamental to building a healthier, more resilient population that will be in a better position to confront COVID-19 and future health emergencies.

Greater effort is needed to increase tobacco taxation, which provides governments with sorely needed resources; we must ban all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship to reduce demand and avoid recruitment of new users; and we need to strengthen tobacco cessation services, to extend a lifeline for current tobacco users.

Other measures are important, particularly in your Region - a big tobacco producer - where attention must be paid to crop diversification and alternative, environmentally friendly livelihoods for tobacco farmers.

The tobacco industry has taken advantage of the pandemic, attempting to sanitize its image through so-called Corporate Social Responsibility practices, offering highly publicized assistance to governments of low and middle-income countries during this period of great vulnerability.

Government-wide implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC is the remedy to protect tobacco control policies from the predatory practices of an industry that produces a product that kills at least half of its users.

Tobacco control is also a key element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through SDG Target 3.a, which specifically calls on States to strengthen implementation of the WHO FCTC.

Achieving Target 3.a will reverberate well beyond SDG 3 on good health and well-being, creating a direct positive impact on many of the other SDG targets.
I would like to leave you with three final points:

First, to re-emphasize that tobacco control can contribute to the global recovery from this pandemic, and should be an integral part of national recovery plans for the post-Covid-19 period.

Second, since illicit trade in tobacco products has a negative impact not only on public health, but also on national economies, I call on all Parties to the WHO FCTC to become Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

The Protocol has 63 Parties, but only India and Sri Lanka from this Region have joined this important global bulwark to stem the flow of illicit tobacco products.

Lastly, I urge Member States that are Parties to fully participate in the upcoming 9th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC and 2nd Meeting of the Parties to the Illicit Trade Protocol - to be held virtually in November.

Let’s continue to push forward as a global community to strengthen our tobacco control efforts and build resilient, healthy populations.

The Convention Secretariat stands ready to work together with the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia to support countries in your Region.

Thank you. 

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