Statement at the 75th session of the WHO Regional Committee meeting for South-East Asia
Secretariat of the WHO FCTC
5-9 September 2022

Dear Chairperson, Regional Director, esteemed colleagues, a very good afternoon to you all.

I want to begin by applauding the commitment shown by Member States as well as the leadership of the Regional Director in helping accelerate implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

I would also like to commend the Region for demonstrating progress in tobacco control. Notably, five out of the top ten countries or territories in terms of size as an average of the tobacco package front and back are from this Region: Timor-Leste, Maldives, Nepal, India and Thailand. Thailand and Myanmar have also introduced plain packaging.

We also take note of the burden of smokeless and chewing tobacco and its contribution to lip and oral cavity cancer as a public health problem for several countries in the Region. We are pleased to announce that we will soon be releasing a best practices report on smokeless tobacco as well as a legislation manual for strengthening smokeless tobacco control.

I would like to encourage Member States to further accelerate implementation of the Convention as we all work towards achieving the target of a 30% relative reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use by 2025 among people aged 15 years and older.

The Convention Secretariat stands ready to help maintain that momentum, working closely with the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia and the various partners engaged. Indeed, we are already doing so through the FCTC 2030 project, in partnership with WHO and UNDP, where we have been providing targeted support to four countries in the Region, namely, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and Timor-Leste to help strengthen their tobacco control policies and regulations.
Last year, COP9 adopted a Declaration calling on Parties to include in their post-COVID-19 recovery plans actions relating to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.a on implementation of the WHO FCTC and SDG Target 3.4 on prevention and treatment of noncommunicable diseases. COP9 also called on the Parties to take appropriate measures to prevent tobacco industry interference in public health policies.

We call on new partners such as development banks and regional economic integration groups, IGOs and NGOs to join our collective efforts to fight the tobacco epidemic. We also call on State Parties who are not yet Parties to the WHO FCTC and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products to ratify the treaties as soon as possible.

Thank you.