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SEVENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Statement of the Head of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and the Protocol on agenda item 9.6.

Dates 7-9 October 2024

Statement:

Chairperson, Regional Director, distinguished delegates.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are among the world's greatest threats to health and development, being responsible for 62% of all death in the South-East Asia Region. Tobacco is a common risk factor to all major NCDs.

The SEA Region has the highest number of smokeless tobacco use in the world, comprising 77% of the global burden. Although the Region is on track to reach the NCD Action Plan target of 30% relative reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use by 2025, it still remains the region with highest overall tobacco use prevalence.

Out of eleven, ten Member States in this Region are Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. But accelerated efforts are needed to implement the provisions of the Convention as a priority at country level. It is of the utmost importance to protect the youth not only from tobacco products but also from the new and emerging nicotine products that the tobacco industry is fiercely marketing to them.

I congratulate the Regional Director and colleagues from SEA Region for the publication entitled "Two decades of WHO FCTC implementation in South-East-Asia Region" presented during this Session.

Tobacco industry interference remains the biggest challenge that countries face, and we must remain vigilant knowing that this industry will never cease in their intents to derail policies that are known to be very effective, like the ones contained in the WHO FCTC.

Next year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, and this could be a good reason to double our efforts to advance its implementation.

And finally, the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, a treaty that is fundamental to protect the advances of the Convention. At present, SEA Region has only two Parties to the Protocol in the region, therefore I call on Parties to consider ratifying the Protocol as well.

Thank you very much.