

**F C T C**WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON TOBACCO CONTROL

S E C R E T A R I A T

CS/HS/23/100

Written Statement for the 70th WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean

Head of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

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

I would like to congratulate the Regional Director and your Excellencies for the commitment you have shown to tobacco control and for your achievements in that regard to date.

On behalf of the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – or WHO FCTC – I am pleased to note the progress report on the implementation of the regional strategy and action plan for tobacco control 2019-2023.

I was also very pleased to learn about the creation of a High-Level Ministerial Group on the Control of Tobacco and Emerging Tobacco and Nicotine Products in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, an excellent example of how countries can rise to an occasion with a robust commitment to address difficult challenges.

Member States in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have built unprecedented momentum for tobacco control, but this energy must be sustained to achieve long-term health gains.

The Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products is a key policy tool to further strengthen our ability to effectively address the tobacco epidemic.

To date, seven countries in your Region have become Parties to the Protocol, but we look to the remaining 12 Parties to the Convention to join this regional and global effort.

I urge all countries to continue their tobacco control efforts, and to implement the effective demand-reduction measures of the WHO FCTC. Most importantly, efforts must be made to

counteract the interference of the tobacco industry and its front groups in public health matters in, which the industry has attempted to claim seats at the policy-making table.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the Convention Secretariat has noted with concern that some Parties have been approached by the tobacco and other industry representatives, to offer travel and technical support, including advisors, for their official delegations for COP10 and MOP3. I would like to take this opportunity to remind Parties that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests. We should protect the integrity of the Protocol at all costs and observe Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. We must remain vigilant.

I strongly encourage Member States that are Parties to actively participate in the upcoming 10th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC and 3rd Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, be held this November in Panama City.

We fully support the proposal to extend the implementation period for the regional strategy to 2030 – a similar request will be made to our upcoming governing bodies in relation to the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control 2019-2025.

The Convention Secretariat remains steadfast in our support for the WHO FCTC Parties from the Eastern Mediterranean Region in advancing their tobacco control work. Only by working together can we achieve a healthy and sustainable population, finally free from tobacco.

Thank you.