Member States call for stronger tobacco control measures
to end tobacco industry interference

MANILA, 16 September 2016 – Tobacco use kills approximately six million people every year worldwide. The Western Pacific Region has one third of the world's smokers and two people die every minute from tobacco-related diseases. It is estimated that in 2025, one fourth of the adult population would still be current smokers. As governments strive to put in place measures to reduce the rate of tobacco use, the tobacco industry continuously invents new tactics to interfere with such policies.

Protecting public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry is one of the major anti-tobacco priorities of Member States. This is known as Article 5.3 in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and will be one of the items discussed when the seventh session of the Conference of Parties (COP 7) gets under way in India this November.

"Six million people a year succumb to tobacco, that is one death every six seconds," said Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific. "We must continue to work together to protect future generations from the dangers of tobacco through new and innovative regulations and policies."

The extent of tobacco industry interference

In its 2016 "Tobacco Industry Interference Index" report, the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) suggests: "The tobacco industry continues to interfere with, deter and thwart governments’ efforts to protect public health through both overt and covert means. It lobbies and dissuades governments from developing and implementing stringent tobacco control policies that are effective. Such obstructive tactics must be exposed to illustrate the various ways in which the industry carries out these activities."

The 2016 SEATCA report outlines evidence of industry interference in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Key findings of the report are as follows:

- "Brunei Darussalam maintains its good record, and the Philippines shines as a leader in the region on dealing with tobacco industry interference through introduction of concrete measures."
Cambodia and Malaysia show good progress in addressing industry interference especially in policy development."

"Indonesia, a non-Party to the FCTC, continues to languish at the bottom as tobacco industry interference worsens."

"Myanmar and Vietnam, new entrants in the survey, show high levels of industry interference."

"Countries that have unnecessary interaction with the tobacco industry also face high levels of tobacco industry influence in policy development."

"Governments still accept or endorse offers of assistance from the tobacco industry in implementing tobacco control policies."

"Tobacco industry related corporate social responsibility activities remain a vulnerable entry point for governments to relate with the industry by endorsing its contributions."

"While Philippines and Thailand have instituted concrete measures to prevent or reduce tobacco industry interference, there is not much improvement across the region such as having a procedure for disclosing interactions with the industry."

The report also made the following recommendations:

"Procedures need to be put in place to reduce tobacco industry participation in policy development in every country."

"Transparency is needed in dealing with the tobacco industry, and this is a major area that needs improvement."

"A whole-of-government approach is vital for FCTC Article 5.3 implementation. Governments need to record and document all meetings with the tobacco industry and their outcomes. The tobacco industry continues to obtain benefits to do its business in several countries. Departments/ministries of health need to work more closely with the departments/ministries of trade and industry to address this. A practical way forward would be to adopt a Code of Conduct for government officials."

"Ban corporate social responsibility activities by the tobacco industry."

"Require tobacco companies to disclose and report on all expenditure on marketing, retailer incentives, philanthropy, lobbying and political contributions."

SEATCA urges governments to dramatically scale up efforts to implement Article 5.3, which is vital in strengthening tobacco control. More concerted effort is needed to emphasize the importance of Article 5.3 and its robust implementation.

**Helping Member States fight tobacco industry interference**

COP 7 is the most important global anti-tobacco conference which will also review the implementation of the WHO FCTC and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. Prior to this important gathering in India, WHO in the Western Pacific and the Convention Secretariat are convening a preparatory workshop, which will bring together representatives from Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam. Australia will chair the workshop in recognition of its capacity as the regional coordinator of the COP.

Participants will discuss the agenda items of COP 7 and their implications for tobacco control in the Western Pacific; coordinate Western Pacific Region Member States'
planned actions and contributions at COP 7; and strengthen regional action on implementing Article 5.3 as a highlighted item for COP 7.

"Unless we all take action, tobacco deaths will exceed eight million by 2030," said Dr Shin. "I therefore urge everyone to collaborate strongly and resist tobacco industry interference so we can end the scourge brought by tobacco once and for all."

Note to editors

Article 5.3 of the Convention requires that “in setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law”. The Convention recommends that the following important activities be implemented to address tobacco industry interference in public health policies:

- Raise awareness about the addictive and harmful nature of tobacco products and about tobacco industry interference with Parties’ tobacco control policies.
- Establish measures to limit interactions with the tobacco industry and ensure the transparency of those interactions that occur.
- Reject partnerships and non-binding or non-enforceable agreements with the tobacco industry.
- Avoid conflicts of interest for government officials and employees.
- Require that information provided by the tobacco industry be transparent and accurate.
- Denormalize and, to the extent possible, regulate activities described as “socially responsible” by the tobacco industry, including but not limited to activities described as “corporate social responsibility”.
- Do not give preferential treatment to the tobacco industry.
- Treat State-owned tobacco industry in the same way as any other tobacco industry.

Related links:

Health topic: Tobacco
http://www.who.int/topics/tobacco/en/

Guidelines for implementation Article 5.3 | Article 8 | Articles 9 and 10 | Article 11 | Article 12 | Article 13 | Article 14
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/80510/1/9789241505185_eng.pdf?ua=1

WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2015

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