



## Media Release

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### Tobacco control at a crossroads

**World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases Michael R. Bloomberg warn against Big Tobacco's increasing efforts to undermine global advances in tobacco control**

**Bloomberg Philanthropies announce the creation of STOP, a new global tobacco watchdog to monitor and expose tobacco industry interference in public health policy**

**Wednesday, 7 March, 2018 (Cape Town, South Africa)** – Key figures in the fight against tobacco use today told delegates of the [17<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Tobacco or Health \(WCTOH\)](#) that public health gains made under the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) are being subjected to unprecedented levels of attack from the tobacco industry. During the opening plenary session, speakers called for a renewed focus on the tobacco control policies that are proven to help users quit, and to prevent non-users from becoming addicted.

Some 2000 delegates – researchers, scientists, UN and civil society representatives, healthcare professionals and policymakers from more than 100 countries – are attending the triennial conference, held this year in Cape Town, South Africa, 7 – 9 March. The conference theme, *Uniting the World For A Tobacco Free Generation*, recognises that international collaboration is vital for tackling tobacco use, which remains the world's leading preventable cause of death, killing more than seven million people each year. WCTOH is the premier international forum on tobacco control. This year's event is the first in its 50-year history to be held on the African continent.

"We in South Africa are honoured to be co-hosting this important international conference with world experts and fellow health workers to address this epidemic by working together to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure," said South African Health Minister **Dr Aaron Motsoaledi**.

The WHO FCTC forms the cornerstone of the conference. It remains one of the most swiftly embraced United Nations treaties, gaining 181 Parties in just over ten years. These 181 countries are legally obliged to adopt and implement its evidence-based measures for reducing tobacco use. Since it came into force over a decade ago high impact policies including 100 percent smoke-free public places, bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, graphic health warnings and plain tobacco packaging have been increasingly introduced by countries around the world.

But speakers at today's opening plenary warned that new moves by the tobacco industry, such as the Philip Morris International-funded [Foundation for a Smoke-Free World](#), were cynical attempts by tobacco companies to re-brand themselves as 'responsible' and therefore 'legitimate' contributors to the public health debate. The WHO FCTC explicitly states that the interests of the tobacco industry are fundamentally irreconcilable with the interests of public health, and as such, tobacco industry involvement in public health must be prevented.

"Tobacco use damages not just health, but also economies, environments, education and equity – it is a barrier to sustainable development on all fronts," said WHO Director-General **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**. "Now is the time for leaders to implement strong policies proven to protect their citizens from tobacco. Today is a call to action in Africa and around the world to beat tobacco."

Dr Ghebreyesus was joined on stage by WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases Michael R. Bloomberg who announced earlier today the creation of [STOP](#) (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products), a global watchdog announced by Mike Bloomberg that will aggressively monitor deceptive tobacco industry tactics

"Tobacco control measures have saved nearly 35 million lives around the world, but as more cities and countries take action, the tobacco industry is pushing to find new users, particularly among young people," said **Michael R. Bloomberg**, WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Bloomberg Philanthropies Founder. "We cannot stand by as the industry misleads the public in an effort to get more people hooked on its products -- and this global watchdog will help us fight back."

**Dr Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva**, Head of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC told delegates that tobacco control was at the heart of the new Sustainable Development Agenda.

"By accelerating the implementation of the WHO FCTC, the global tobacco control treaty, and becoming Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, countries can facilitate the achievement of their goals by 2030 and save tens of millions of lives," said da Costa e Silva.

"The rise in tobacco industry interference in public health policy is a reaction to the progress made in tobacco control over the last decade. It is a testament to the impact of global efforts to reduce tobacco use. This conference is an opportunity to unite and renew our commitment to policies under the WHO FCTC that are proven to protect health. We must commit to a laser focus on these evidence-based measures," said **Professor Harry Lando**, Chair of the WCTOH Organising Committee. "We look forward to reviewing successes, consolidating best practice and strategising the future path of tobacco control over the next few days in Cape Town."

"This conference comes at a pivotal moment for tobacco control. As progress accelerates globally to protect health and economies from the devastation of tobacco use, so the tobacco industry is stepping up efforts to promote and extend its market by all possible means," said **José Luis Castro**, Executive Director of The Union, Secretariat for WCTOH. "The tobacco control community must work with ever greater collaboration to counter the incursions of Big Tobacco into the public health arena. We must be single-minded in our focus, and work to strengthen WHO FCTC measures in all countries around the world."

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The conference programme can be viewed [online](#).

Photos of the press conference will be available here: <https://wctoh.smugmug.com/17th-World-Conference-on-Tobacco-or-Health/>

#### **Further information:**

Media registration is free for all accredited media representatives.

The complete press programme is available [here](#).

For more information on media registration, programme details and interview requests please contact:

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#### **About the 17<sup>TH</sup> World Conference on Tobacco or Health**

The 17th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) is being held in Cape Town, South Africa from 7-9 March 2018. It will unite researchers, academics, non-governmental organisations, civil society, scientists, healthcare professionals, policymakers and public officials working on all aspects of tobacco control from more than 100 countries.

Convened by WCTOH's Advisory Board, the Cape Town Consortium and the Conference Secretariat (The Union), WCTOH is a call for a collective resolution to fight tobacco use by working together and integrating tobacco control into our health and development goals. Held every three years, WCTOH is the premier international conference on tobacco control.

The conference theme – *Uniting the World for a Tobacco Free Generation* – recognises that tobacco control is a global issue, crossing all geographic boundaries. The World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) stands as the backdrop for the conference and for our global response to the tobacco epidemic. It is the only internationally, legally-binding health treaty of the 21st century.