

Opening statement for the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
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WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: a powerful tool

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this third session of the Conference of the Parties. I only regret that, due to prior commitments, I cannot be with you in person.

Last month, WHO issued its *World health report*, this year devoted to primary health care, which also brings a strong focus on prevention. Among its many recommendations and findings, the report estimates that better use of existing measures could prevent around 70% of the global disease burden.

Without question, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is the most powerful tool we have, as an international community, to reduce the global disease burden. As we all know, tobacco use is the single greatest preventable cause of death in the world today.

The Framework Convention has been a "first" in many ways. It marked the first use of WHO's constitutional authority to issue an international health treaty. It pioneered a powerful model of collaboration, not just as an international community, but also among many government ministries that rarely work together in the pursuit of health goals.

We must never underestimate the power of these achievements.

In our closely interconnected societies, health problems increasingly have global causes and global consequences that make a clear case for concerted action, also with non-health sectors. This is especially true for chronic noncommunicable diseases.

These diseases share risk factors linked to unhealthy lifestyles, like tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and inadequate physical activity. As *The world health report* notes, the spread of these unhealthy lifestyles is now an alarming global trend. Moreover, control of these risk factors lies beyond the direct responsibility of the health sector.

Prevention thus requires the kind of international collaboration and multisectoral action embodied in the Framework Convention and central to its implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The first *WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic*, issued earlier this year, provides the most comprehensive collection of data on tobacco use and control measures ever assembled at the global level.

The report presents an implementation tool for the demand reduction measures contained in the Framework Convention. This technical assistance tool, called MPOWER, consists of six proven policy measures reflecting one or more provisions of the treaty. It is part of WHO's approach to supporting countries in the critical work of implementation.

These are cost-effective, common-sense measures that are within the reach of every country, regardless of income level. Unfortunately, the report also reveals that only 5% of the world's population is fully protected by these measures.

This tells us the clear challenge ahead: to ensure full implementation of the Framework Convention at country level. In implementing these effective measures, we deliver the true "silver bullets" of preventive medicine.

But let me remind you. Both the text and the spirit of the Convention encourage Parties to go beyond the treaty. WHO has always maintained that the Convention gives countries a floor, and not a ceiling, for tobacco control.

Today, this first tobacco treaty is at a critical moment in its evolution, where action is required to ensure its status as a living document with a long lifespan.

You have before you an ambitious and important agenda. The current negotiations of a protocol on illicit trade in tobacco products are a

strong step in the right direction. It now falls to all of us, working to eliminate the tobacco epidemic, to see that instruments, like the guidelines developed by the Conference of the Parties, are implemented in ways that maximize their potential.

I wish you a most productive meeting. You are, once again, demonstrating the power of prevention, and the power of international collaboration, to improve the world's health on a truly grand scale.

Thank you.