**World No Tobacco Day**

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Life is all about taking up good habits and giving up bad ones. The year 1987 and 1988 will be remembered in commendable words by the comity of nations as the United Nations (UN) World Health Assembly passed Resolution WHA40.38, in 1987 calling for 7 April to be observed as World No-Smoking Day and afterward in 1988, Resolution WHA42.19 was passed calling for the observance of World No Tobacco Day on 31 May, every year.

Through these resolutions, the Member States of the World Health Organisation (WHO) wanted to raise awareness about the harms caused by tobacco products to people, public health, communities, and the environment. This year as the WHO and public health champions from across the globe are coming together to raise awareness about the harmful influences of the tobacco industry on the public especially on youth, various public and private organizations and departments in Pakistan will observe the day with full zeal and zest to make an impact in gaining the desired result of creating awareness about the menace of tobacco.

Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), the premier Research and Development (R&D) organization of the country, working in diverse fields of national importance using nuclear technology for peace and development, is also observing World No Tobacco Day 2024 at PAEC Headquarters, all allied centers and 19 cancer hospitals across the country. Leading from the front, Chairman PAEC, Dr. Raja Ali Raza Anwar headed the campaign of World No Tobacco Day across PAEC. In this regard, awareness walks, and sessions were held at all PAEC establishments highlighting the hazards of tobacco use on human health with a special focus on saving future generations represented by youth from the harmful effects of tobacco and associated products. The theme of World No Tobacco Day 2024 is focused on advocating for an end to the targeting of youth with harmful tobacco products. This discourse provides a platform for young people, policy-makers and tobacco control advocates globally to discuss the issue and urge governments to adopt policies that shield young people from the manipulative practices of the tobacco and related industries. Although cigarette smoking has decreased over the years due to phenomenal efforts by the tobacco control community, more must be done to safeguard these vulnerable groups.

According to 2022 data, worldwide, at least 37 million young people aged 13–15 years use some form of tobacco. In the WHO European Region, 11.5% of boys and 10.1% of girls aged 13–15 years are tobacco users (nearly 4 million). To keep making billions of dollars in revenue, the tobacco industry needs to replace the millions of customers who die and those who quit tobacco use every year. To achieve this goal, it works to create an environment that promotes the uptake of its products among the next generation, including lax regulation to ensure its products are available and affordable. The industry also develops products and advertising tactics that appeal to children and adolescents, reaching them through social media and streaming platforms. Products such as electronic cigarettes and nicotine pouches are gaining popularity among youth. It is estimated that 12.5% of adolescents in the European Region used e-cigarettes in 2022 compared to 2% of adults. In some countries of the Region, the rates of e-cigarette use among schoolchildren is 2-3 times higher than the rates of cigarette smoking. The industry wilfully sells a deadly dependency to young people, therefore WNTD 2024 calls on the governments and tobacco control community to protect current and future generations and to hold the tobacco industry liable for the harm it causes.

Last year, in February, the Finance (Supplementary) Act of 2023 saw FED rates spike by 146 percent for economy brands of cigarettes and 154 percent for premium brands. As per media reports published on May 5, 2024, a Pakistan-based think tank Center for Research and Dialogue conducted a survey which disclosed that 18 percent of smokers were forced to quit smoking following a significant increase in cigarette prices. The findings underscore the effectiveness of high tobacco taxation as a vital measure in combating tobacco consumption. World Health Organisation (WHO) advocates for this.

This year, while the federal health ministry in Pakistan has proposed that the Federal Excise Duty (FED) on cigarettes be increased by 20 percent in the upcoming budget, the WHO has demanded it should be increased by 37 percent. As per official figures, 31.6 million adults currently use tobacco in Pakistan and it results in more than 160,000 deaths every year, while smoking-related illnesses and deaths cost the country at least 1.4pc of its GDP annually.

It is high time that all citizens, government departments as well and non-governmental organizations join hands to safeguard our future generation from the hazards of tobacco use and demand that the government continue the positive steps to further tax the tobacco industry. Meanwhile, a word of advice for tobacco consumers is to eliminate tobacco from their lives before it eliminates them because tarring the roads might be a wise idea but tarring the lungs is surely not.

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