



AHO President Statement in Support of World No Tobacco Day

On 31 May, we celebrate World No Tobacco Day by raising awareness about the harmful and deadly effects of smoking and the use of tobacco products. This year's theme, "Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing them from tobacco and nicotine use" draws attention to the tobacco industry's deliberate tactics to attract youth to tobacco products. This theme underscores the need to break free from the tobacco and related industries' manipulation by becoming educated on their tactics and the harm caused by their products.

On a global level, the figures are staggering – tobacco kills 8 million people every year. 7 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use. This is why the industry is targeting the younger generation, from product design to marketing campaigns, to replace the loss of customers due to tobacco-attributable deaths with new young consumers.

Tobacco is one of the greatest public health threats the world has ever faced. The situation in Africa looks set to get worse. About 6% of the world's adult smokers – about 77 million – live in Africa. If the tobacco industry continues to operate largely unregulated, this could increase to 572 million by 2100. More alarmingly, across Africa, children, and youth use tobacco twice as much as their parents. This is now true in Nigeria, Botswana, Uganda, and South Africa. The industry has successfully managed to attract the youth through a variety of strategies, such as:

- Youth-appealing flavours
- Stylish product designs
- Claims of "harm reduction"
- Social media marketing
- Sponsored branding from celebrities and/or influencers.

We must also remember the target, set under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one third by 2030. A central pillar for achieving this requires a dramatic reduction in tobacco use globally, including Africa. Current trends suggests that we are off track and will miss this target. But it should not be this way.

AHO is working hard to protect African citizens from the hazardous effects of tobacco use. Our Tobacco Control team works to help reduce the burden of disease, death, and economic consequences caused by tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke in Africa. It is now increasingly imperative that governments work jointly with civil society to implement the mandates of AHO Framework on Tobacco Control to protect their citizens from tobacco and educate them about the dangers associated with the industry's manipulative tactics.

The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has required governments to focus virtually all their efforts and resources on protecting the health and well-being of their citizens. Rightly so: proving that health is the first and most immediate priority.

In this context, I am grateful that World No Tobacco Day provides us an opportunity to spark conversations on the deception and lies of the tobacco industry. I therefore count on our Friends of AHO and country governments to help reach our common goals. Together, I know that we can work towards ensuring Africa's youth lead happy, healthy, and tobacco-free lives. So, let us get to work!

Written by Zach Malik, Speechwriter on behalf of the President,

AHO PRESS OFFICE, 43 Berkeley Square, London, W1J 5FJ, info@aho.org