90 Percent of Africans Are Not Protected By Smoke-free Laws

Despite Tobacco Industry's Powerful Efforts to Halt Progress, Several Countries Continue to Put Smoke-free Laws into Place

Atlanta 2009/11/11 -As African nations are poised to undergo the highest increase in the rate of tobacco use among developing countries, nearly 90 percent of people on the continent remain without meaningful protection from secondhand smoke, according to a new report released at a regional cancer conference today.

The report, *Global Voices: Rebutting the Tobacco Industry, Winning Smokefree Air*, points to signs of hope, however. Several African countries are fighting against the tobacco industry's aggressive efforts to stop public health interventions by putting smoke-free laws into place, protecting more than 100 million more people since 2007. The report was published by the multi-partner Global Smokefree Partnership.

"For the first time in history, we have the tools in hand to prevent a pandemic," said Dr. Otis W. Brawley, chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. "Recent data suggests that, with current trends, more than half of the region of Africa will double its tobacco consumption within 12 years. Smoke-free public places are one example of a low-cost and extremely effective intervention that must be implemented now to protect health."

Within the last year, Kenya and Niger have enacted national smoke-free policies, and South Africa, which has been smoke-free since March 2007, continues to play an important role in the region, demonstrating that smoke-free laws can work in Africa. In a first for the region, Mauritius recently passed a law that is close to meeting the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) standards, ranking among the most robust anti-smoking measures in the world.

Implementation remains a challenge in many places, including Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Uganda, according to the report. Obstacles include identifying resources for implementation, and opposition to smoke-free laws by the tobacco industry. In Abuja, Nigeria, for example, 55 percent of school students are not aware that secondhand smoke is harmful to health, and only 1 percent of Nigeria's population is protected by strong smoke-free laws.

The report exposes the tobacco industry's tactics to hold back legislation and to convince African governments that tobacco is important to economic activity; that raising taxes on cigarettes and implementing smoke-free laws will result in revenue and job losses. In Kenya, for example, the tobacco industry has issued a legal challenge to a strong smoke-free law passed by the Parliament. And in Zambia, British American Tobacco has helped to dilute proposals for a smoke-free law.

However, evidence over the years suggests that the alleged revenue losses do not occur. According to the report, the smoke-free law in Mauritius is not expected to impact tourist revenues, which account for over a quarter of GDP. In South Africa, VAT returns showed that smoke-free laws had no significant effect on restaurant revenues, and may have had a positive effect. When South Africa raised its taxes, revenues rose. And in countries where governments often lack a surplus of revenue, raising taxes is found to be beneficial to social services, education, and healthcare.

In addition to smokefree laws, economic interventions, such as imposing high taxes on cigarettes, have significant potential to effectively and efficiently decrease consumption rates in Africa. Doubling the price of cigarettes by increasing the tax can lower consumption by fully 60 percent. This is holding true in many African nations. In South Africa, for example, tobacco consumption has fallen by one-third since 1993, when aggressive increases in cigarettes taxes began to take hold.

It is estimated that in 2010 smoking will claim the lives of 6 million people worldwide, 72 percent of whom reside in low- and middle-income countries. If current trends continue, tobacco will kill 7 million people annually by 2020 and more than 8 million people annually by 2030.

Nearly 1 billion people living in some 45 countries globally are now protected from the health hazards of

secondhand tobacco smoke at work and in public places. Despite the rapid progress, more than 85 percent of the world's people still remain without meaningful protection from secondhand smoke, many of them in the low- and middle-income countries.

The report by the Global Smokefree Partnership was launched at a Media Summit hosted by the American Cancer Society in advance of the AORTIC Cancer in Africa conference beginning on Nov. 12 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, and with programs in more than 20 countries, we fight for every birthday threatened by cancer in communities worldwide. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying people across the globe to join the fight. As a global leader in cancer research investment, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. To learn more or to get help, and for more information on our global programs, visit www.cancer.org/international.

The Global Smokefree Partnership

is a multipartner initiative formed to promote effective smoke-free air policies worldwide. The Partnership is hosted by the American Cancer Society and the Framework Convention Alliance. The Steering Group members are: Action on Smoking and Health – DC, Action on Smoking and Health London, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Cancer Research UK, HealthBridge India, International Union Against Cancer, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Promoting Action for Smoke-free Environments (APALTA), Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Smokefree Partnership Europe, Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance, World Heart Federation, World Lung Foundation. Other partners include Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer.

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