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Paramaribo, 28 January 2011 Ministry of Health /PAHO-WHO Suriname- Policy officers and legal advisers from various government agencies and the private sector in Suriname, including the Ministry of Health, Justice, Trade and Industry and Labor commenced with the preparation of the Tobacco Act for Suriname from 25 to 28 January 2011, with the technical assistance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). This national Tobacco Act aims to reduce tobacco use, protection from exposure to tobacco smoke (passive smoking), prohibition of any advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products and the ban of sale of tobacco products which are not labeled with required health warnings by the Ministry of Health. Suriname is aiming for these tobacco control measures because they have proved highly effective in reducing tobacco consumption and health benefits.

The Government of Suriname has taken a large first step in pushing forward towards the objective of combating tobacco use through its work on a law which begins to implement the life saving measures contained in the first global health treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). This international treaty, which is one of the most widely embraced treaties in United Nations history, has been ratified by 171 other countries in addition to Suriname, and Parties to this treaty all over the world are already in the midst of protecting the health of their people through the implementation of strong tobacco control measures. Tobacco control measures such as banning smoking in public places, workplaces and public transport in order to protect the population from toxic second-hand smoke, taxation on tobacco products, mandating health warnings on tobacco product packaging in order to warn people about the devastating effects of tobacco use, and banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship in order to restrict the tobacco industry's ability to aggressively target, and market to, vulnerable groups, including women and children.

Though Suriname has not begun to implement its obligations under the WHO FCTC to date, Suriname is now ready to face the challenge and can benefit from lessons learned by other countries in order to ensure a strong tobacco law within these borders. Global tobacco use kills close to six million people a year - more than tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined - and an average of one person every six seconds and one in 10 adults succumbs to tobacco use. Unchecked, tobacco-related deaths will increase to more than eight million per year by 2030, and up to half of current users will eventually die of a tobacco-related disease.

Tobacco is indeed the single most preventable cause of death in the world today. It is the only legal consumer product that can harm everyone exposed to it – and it kills up to half of those who use it as intended. Yet, tobacco use is common throughout the world due to low prices, aggressive and widespread marketing and practices by multinational tobacco companies, lack of awareness about its dangers, and inconsistent public policies against its use.

The contribution of tobacco to death and disease is well documented. Less attention is given to the ways in which tobacco increases poverty. These economic costs of tobacco use are equally devastating. In addition to the high public health costs of treating tobacco-caused diseases both for governments and individuals, tobacco kills people at the height of their productivity, depriving families of breadwinners and nations of a healthy workforce. Tobacco users are also less productive while they are alive due to increased sickness.

Tobacco companies continue to resist the life-saving measures that have been discussed this week and they will continue to oppose the Government's efforts to strengthen tobacco control in this country. This is devastating for the health of the Surinamese people, and in line with support from the international community, civil society, and all Parties to the WHO FCTC, the World Health Organization and PAHO also express a full commitment to provide expertise and technical support to Suriname in passing strong tobacco control laws which will position Suriname as a leader both in the region and globally in ensuring that the tobacco industry's scare tactics do not meet with success.

Recent tobacco studies in Suriname show that:

- About half of the Surinamese population live in homes where others smoke in their presence and also about half of the Surinamese children's parents smoke in their presence
- Most people in Suriname think smoking should be banned from public places
- The vast majority of Surinamese are convinced that second hand tobacco smoke is harmful to them. (Global youth Tobacco Survey 2009).

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