

Minister's Message on World No Tobacco Day

31st May 2017

Non Communicable Diseases are one of the biggest challenges for Seychelles development. While many positive strides have been taken, smoking remains one of the most at risk behaviours that Seychellois engage in and which affects our development trajectory and places a heavy burden on our health system.

We join the world to mark World Tobacco Day - to continue to challenge ourselves to go further and do better.

World No Tobacco Day, commemorated every year on 31st May, highlights health and other risks associated with tobacco use, and advocating for effective policies and programs to reduce tobacco use in the population.

The theme "Tobacco – a threat to development" has been chosen for World No Tobacco Day this year by the World Health Organisation. The theme aims at highlighting the threats that tobacco poses to the sustainable development of all countries, including the health and economic well-being of their citizens. It is also a reminder of the measures that Governments and the society at large can take to promote health and development by addressing the global tobacco crisis.

Smoking often starts at an early age. A recent survey amongst Seychellois youth aged 13-15 showed that a quarter of all students have smoked a cigarette before the age of 13 and 15% of children regularly smoke at least once per month. Although two thirds of adolescent smokers wish to stop smoking, only a few of them, unfortunately, will actually stop because smoking is highly addictive. Hence, many of these young smokers will become lifelong smokers and expose themselves to disease. The survey also showed that those children who have parents who smoke are more likely to also try smoking. Therefore it is particularly important that young people do not start smoking and their environment does not encourage them to smoke.

Seychelles has implemented strong policies against tobacco. The Tobacco Control Act enacted in 2009 prohibits smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces as well as on all public transport. All tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship are banned by law. Since December 2016, cigarette packets sold in Seychelles must display a mandatory health warning

including a text message and a colour picture that covers at least 50% of the two main sides of the cigarette packets.

In addition, Seychelles subjects tobacco products to high taxes in order to reduce the demand, and a recent tax increase took effect since a few weeks ago, in line with the Framework Convention of Tobacco Control. All these measures have been instrumental in curbing the prevalence of smoking observed in Seychelles in both adults and in children.

As the government continues the fight against tobacco use in order to protect the health of our population, I also urge each one of us to personally and collectively engage towards a tobacco-free Seychelles. This includes abstaining to take up smoking and, for those who smoke, to quit the habit in order to protect their health as well as the health of the people exposed to second-hand smoke. Money not spent on tobacco can be in turn, used for other essential uses, including the purchase of healthy food, personal wellbeing and education.

As tobacco use is and remains the main modifiable risk factor for non-communicable disease, I call on all Seychellois, on this World No Tobacco Day, to work together to reduce the burden of suffering and disease related to tobacco in Seychelles and to promote a tobacco free healthy environment.

