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PRESS RELEASE

TOBACCO CONTROL CONFERENCE IN SINGAPORE CLOSURES ON INSPIRING NOTE

Showcasing of successful global approaches galvanises delegates for local action

Singapore, 24 March 2012: The 15th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) concluded today in Singapore after a successful five-day programme with a packed agenda and fully-subscribed plenaries and symposiums.

2. Some of the world's leading names in tobacco control came together to provide opportunities for 2,600 delegates, experts and policy-makers from over 100 countries to exchange ideas and be inspired by best practices from around the globe.

3. Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, said: "I commend the Health Promotion Board of Singapore for organising an excellent conference. The alliances that were formed here, the information and resources that were shared here, have galvanised the global tobacco control movement. I am sure I speak for all the participants that when we leave, we are better prepared and able to work for full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco and a tobacco-free world free."

4. As host of the 15th WCTOH, Singapore shared its experience with graphic health warnings, smoke-free bans as well as a grassroots movement and support structures to encourage smokers to quit the habit. "First of all, we are glad to see other countries sharing our vision of bringing the national smoking rate to below 10 per cent. Many ideas discussed during the 15th WCTOH focused on the better implementation of top-down solutions like

taxation, bans and restrictions on advertising. Singapore expanded this dialogue by sharing our experience in creating a ground-up social movement to complement top-down policies. We are heartened that many experts have voiced their support of such a bottom-up movement to 'de-normalise' smoking as well as our tough tobacco control policies. Moving to the next step after the 15th WCTOH, Singapore will explore the ideas shared at the conference and consider adapting solutions that work effectively in the local context," said Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, Singapore's Health Promotion Board (HPB).

5. A/Prof Philip Eng, President, 15th WCTOH said that it had been an outstanding experience and honour for Singapore to host the conference: "As a respiratory physician, I have spent most of my professional life taking care of patients who have been ravaged by tobacco. I am heartened by all that we have learned from the distinguished conference faculty on ways to prevent this from happening to future generations. We have also made so many new friends among the diverse pool of delegates who shared their experiences. I think the future of tobacco control is bright as we are all united with one vision towards a tobacco-free world."

6. Prof Judith Mackay, Senior Advisor, World Lung Foundation, Hong Kong, who has been attending WCTOH for 25 years said: "The Singapore conference has been truly inspirational and put us on a new trajectory in our determination to fight a despicable industry and to put an end to the global tobacco pandemic."

7. A delegate from the African nation of Burundi, Mr Roger Ciza, a 29-year-old medical student, said the conference had given him a chance to see the scale of tobacco control efforts all the way from Singapore to Australia. "I met so many people and learned so much about how to manage tobacco control programmes. I was also able to learn about programmes closer to home, in my own neighbour country of Uganda, which I was unaware of, even though we are located in the same region in East Africa. This has been a really big opportunity for me."

8. For academics, advocates and policy-makers, the conference offered a veritable mine of linkages and a strong message to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the fight for smoke-free lives. "This is a landmark conference because of the strong emphasis by the WHO's Director-General on addressing the tobacco industry factor. It has been present in other

conferences but this conference has really brought it to the foreground and shown that it's where we need to go to end the tobacco epidemic," said Ruth Malone, professor and chair of the department of social and behavioural sciences at the Centre for Tobacco Control, Research and Education at the University of California in San Francisco.

9. Dr Monika Arora, a delegate from India who is director of a non-profit organisation, HRIDAY-SHAN, said the conference had really lived up to its theme of global planning for local action. Key takeaways included lessons from Australia's experience with plain packaging and ways to resist tobacco industry interference. "There were strong lessons in how tobacco industry interference can be effectively countered by bringing in multi-sectoral partnerships within government and between non-profit organisations," she said.

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