

**ASH news release: Immediate - Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2003**

## **ASH says new WHO tobacco treaty text is a 'feeble response' to the global tobacco epidemic**

Commenting on the release of a new text for the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, ASH criticised the new text as failing to offer any kind of proportionate response to the global epidemic of tobacco related disease – now killing almost 5 million people per year (4.9 million).

Clive Bates, Director of the anti-tobacco campaigning group ASH, said:

*Cigarettes are the original weapons of mass destruction, with over five trillion of these biological and chemical devices released into society each year addicting and then killing one in two users and likely to cause a billion deaths in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century if no credible action is taken. The new text a feeble response to the world's worst public health problem.*

*They've started to judge the text by what they think the Americans, Germans and Japanese will sign up to – but we have to look at whether it will actually deliver a meaningful response to the epidemic of tobacco related disease. It's not as bad as we feared, but nothing like as good as it needs to be.*

*The biggest disappointment is over tobacco advertising, which is the vector that spreads tobacco diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and emphysema. If the WHO can't get agreement to rid the world of tobacco advertising then it can't claim to be making a serious response. Almost all the language is voluntary and weak and very little of the text commits countries to actually taking action.*

*More positively, there are some improvements in the language in the area of labelling, which now requires 30% of the pack to have a warning label and also the Chair has removed the clauses that subordinate the tobacco treaty to free-trade. On smuggling the general commitments might be useful, but only if more work is done to give them specific meaning, for example through a protocol.*

*ASH is calling on the progressive majority of states in the negotiations to take the Chair's text and draw up a document that reflects the best evidence-based practice. There should be no question about banning tobacco advertising agreeing tough measures that will be a model for tackling the tobacco epidemic – even if that means leaving Japan, Germany and the United States out of the treaty.*

*There are now just ten days of talking left to get this treaty on track. We hope that the great majority – especially from Africa, Asia and Latin America – will fight hard for a treaty that actually tackles the problem, rather than just vaguely acknowledges it.*

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