

## Statement of Action on Smoking and Health to the FCTC Public Hearing on agricultural diversification and crop alternatives to tobacco, Brasilia, 26 February 2007

1. The quest to find alternative crops to tobacco is an important part of the global approach to tobacco control and should be considered under the over-arching objective of the FCTC – that is, “to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption”.
2. It should be noted that in addition to the devastating health consequences of consuming tobacco products, growing tobacco causes a range of adverse health, social, economic and environmental outcomes.
3. There is well-documented evidence that tobacco farming has deleterious health effects on farmers. These include respiratory, nerve, skin and kidney damage caused by pesticide use; green tobacco sickness caused by absorption of nicotine through the skin; and stunted growth in children who work in tobacco cultivation.<sup>1</sup>
4. The environmental consequences of tobacco production are considerable, including deforestation, soil depletion and erosion, and environmental damage due to excessive pesticide use.<sup>2</sup>
5. The social and economic impacts are also considerable. About 80 per cent of tobacco is grown in developing countries.<sup>3</sup> Cultivating tobacco means there is less land available for food crops. It has been estimated that 10 to 20 million people could be fed by food crops grown instead of tobacco.<sup>4</sup>
6. Despite the relatively high prices paid to tobacco farmers compared to those producing other crops, tobacco farming exacerbates poverty since farmers are required to pay for fertilizers, equipment, etc. Thus crop substitution can help the poorest farmers in transition to other livelihoods, as part of a broader diversification programme.<sup>3</sup>
7. Whilst some form of financial aid may be justified in the short term to help farmers in developing countries to switch to alternative crops, the subsidising of tobacco growing in rich nations cannot be justified either economically or on health grounds.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. The Millennium Development Goals and Tobacco Control, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> BAT's Big Wheeze. The alternative British American Tobacco Social and Environmental Report. ASH, London, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Curbing the Epidemic. Governments and the economics of tobacco control. The World Bank, Washington DC, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Barry, M. The influence of the US Tobacco industry on the health, economy, and environment of developing countries. New England J Medicine, 1991; 324: 917-9

In the EU, for example, tobacco subsidies have been paid to produce types of tobacco for which there is no demand in Europe.

8. Tobacco subsidies artificially raise the world price of tobacco. However, there is little evidence that this affects consumption since the producer price of tobacco leaf accounts for only a small part of the price of cigarettes. Thus the removal of subsidies is unlikely to have any impact on consumption.
9. As part of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, tobacco subsidies are being phased out in the European Union.<sup>5</sup> Instead of payment being linked to production, financial support will be used to fund wider rural development. A similar system could be adopted as a short term measure in other jurisdictions seeking to phase out tobacco production.
10. In the longer term, however, financial support for tobacco production is not desirable and governments should take steps to explore alternatives to tobacco. The main beneficiaries of tobacco production are tobacco companies; for other stakeholders such as farmers, consumers and governments the costs are more likely to outweigh the benefits. As the World Bank notes: "Price supports and subsidies [for tobacco] make little sense in a framework of sound agricultural and trade policies. Their most significant function is perhaps political, enlarging the number of people with a vested interest in tobacco production."<sup>3</sup>
11. In accordance with Article 5.3 of the FCTC, in setting and implementing public health with respect to tobacco control, governments must act to protect these policies from commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry.

## About ASH

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) is a non-governmental, public health organisation, working towards the elimination of the harm caused by tobacco. ASH is a registered UK charity and receives funding from Cancer Research UK, the British Heart Foundation and the Department of Health.

ASH is a member of the Framework Convention Alliance and works with colleagues across the globe in advocating the strongest possible measures to control and reduce tobacco consumption.

ASH has campaigned for a number of years for an end to the subsidising of tobacco within the European Union.

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<sup>5</sup> Activities of the European Union. Summaries of legislation. Markets for agricultural products: Tobacco. SCADPlus <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l11095.htm>