

**SPEECH FOR THE MINISTER: 17TH WORLD CONFERENCE ON
TOBACCO OR HEALTH – UNITING THE WORLD FOR A TOBACCO
FREE GENERATION, 7-9 MARCH 2018**

Programme Director

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Members of the organising and scientific committees

Mr Michael Bloomberg and other sponsors

Distinguished delegates

Good Afternoon!

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome everyone to the 17th World Conference on tobacco or health to Cape Town and South Africa. As this is the first time that the World Congress is being hosted on the African continent, I also wish to thank all those who took this very important decision.

I don't think that I need to inform the distinguished delegates that the beautiful city of Cape Town is currently facing its worst drought in a 100 years. I therefore join others to urge delegates to use water sparingly. Cape Town has a number of attractions, please do find time to visit these attractions and enjoy what Cape Town has to offer its visitors.

That this conference, with its theme of uniting the world for a tobacco free generation is being held on our continent which has a very youthful population reflects the need to focus on the youth as well as the strategies and tactics used by the tobacco industry!

It is now well known that the use of tobacco has no health benefits whatsoever! On the contrary, tobacco use is very, very harmful to health.

The World Health Assembly agreed on a set of targets to reduce tobacco use in 2013. These are to:

- reduce by 30% the prevalence of tobacco use by 2025 so that we can avoid 200 million deaths associated with tobacco use by the end of this century; and
- to reduce by 25% the probability of deaths from non-communicable diseases by 2025.

Let me provide some statistics on the situation on the African continent and elsewhere before I speak to the situation in South Africa. Now here is a worrying statistic: it is estimated that the number of smokers in Africa is projected to increase by 40%, and the outlook beyond 2030 is even worse if one can imagine this. If the tobacco industry is allowed to operate as it wants, the current 77 million adult smokers in Africa will increase to a staggering 572 million by the end of the century.

In addition, according to WHO/AFRO the number of women smokers in the African region is growing!

Given our young population, it is not surprising that the tobacco industry is targeting this continent to increase their sales – as sales in developed countries decline. In addition, the tobacco companies are targeting the ‘black diamonds’ – the emerging middle class in Africa! They do this by advertising smoking as being ‘cool’ and aspirational as well as hosting ‘parties’ and selling cheap but highly addictive tobacco products.

The tobacco industry is also targeting African Americans as well as the mentally ill and the homeless in the US. In addition, this industry is also targeting children and young people in developed as well as development countries. They are clearly targeting those they think are most vulnerable!

The main purpose for the existence of the tobacco industry is to maximise their profits at the cost of the health of the young, working class and the most vulnerable in our countries.

We cannot allow this to stand – what is needed is increased global activism to ensure that we do have a tobacco free generation!

I am pleased that South Africa was one of the first countries to sign the WHO FCTC Protocol to Eliminate the Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. We were recognised globally as a poster child for tobacco control for a number of years. Between 1994 and 2004, adult cigarette smoking prevalence in SA fell dramatically by a fifth from 31% to 24% due to strong government action in increasing excise taxes and through legislation.

It is pleasing that South Africa experienced substantial decreases in the prevalence of smoking since 1991 and the benefits at the population level are observable. Between 1997 and 2010, an overall annual decrease of 0.4% in non-communicable diseases was observed.

This was due to declines in stroke, ischaemic heart disease, oesophageal and lung cancer, asthma and chronic respiratory disease – tobacco is a causal factor in all these diseases.

Studies noted that comprehensive tobacco control legislation has contributed to these declines and the associated reduction in non-communicable diseases.

Recent data from the 2017 South African Demographic and Health Survey shows that in 2016 the prevalence of smoking was 20.7%. This represents a continuing if smaller decline from previous surveys.

Findings from the SADHS (2017) on tobacco use suggest the following:

The prevalence of tobacco use is much higher among men than women; 37% of men age 15 and older report that they currently smoke tobacco products while 7% of women reported smoking. Both men and women who reported tobacco use reported smoking cigarettes. Among men smoking varying little by education or wealth quintile. Whilst among women cigarette smoking correlated with wealth, with the prevalence increasing from 3% among women in the lowest two wealth quintiles to 10% among women in the highest two quintiles. For both men and women smoking rates were higher in urban compared to rural areas.

For men smoking rates were highest in Northern Cape and lowest in Limpopo whilst for women rates were highest in Western Cape and lowest in Northern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal.

It is clear that tobacco use is not uniform throughout the country. This means that whilst regulation must apply across the country, behaviour change strategies to help those who smoke to stop and strategies to prevent those that do not smoke to start need to be differentiated and targeted.

I am pleased to report to this audience that in his budget speech in February the Minister of Finance announced a 3% increase above inflation in excise duties on tobacco products. There is ample evidence that taxes and prices increases are effective means of driving down tobacco use.

On the regulation front it is clear what needs to be done.

We must more rapidly introduce legislation related to prohibiting smoking in doors and close of both residential and commercial buildings. We must further regulate the sale tobacco products. We must increase taxation on tobacco products.

We must move more rapidly to plain packages with health warnings. We must regulate the sale of e-cigarettes.

Some people have argued that further regulation and decreases on spending on tobacco products will hurt the economy through increasing unemployment and reduced tax revenues. The World Health Organisation for example, estimated that globally smoking causes over \$500 billion in economic damage annually.

I have often argued that the health sector, globally will save money if it supplemented the losses reported by the tobacco industry!

I am pleased that yesterday, with Dr Tedros, we have been able to open two international centres for tobacco control research. These are: the African Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research housed at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University in Gauteng and the Economics of Tobacco Control Centre at the University of Cape Town. These two centres will help us with research on various areas of tobacco control to enable us to achieve a tobacco free generation.

The tobacco industry is known globally to pressurize governments, especially low and middle income countries to delay the implementation of FCTC provisions, but as a committed party to the FCTC South Africa:

- Has commenced the process to review our tobacco law to make it better compliant with the FCTC requirements.
- We are committed to plain packaging of tobacco products in order to reduce the products' appeal to young people.
- We are committed to regulating all tobacco and nicotine products as we do cigarettes in order to ensure that every life is protected from second-hand smoke from any tobacco or nicotine-delivery product.
- We are committed to ensuring we have 100% smoke-free public places with no provisions for smoking areas because the smoke from tobacco products cannot be contained in a smoking area. We want to protect everyone who makes the decision not to smoke from bearing the consequences of using tobacco.

At the same time, we also want to encourage smokers to put their health and those of their loved ones first.

This conference must help all countries to move towards a tobacco free world and I commit to doing everything possible to move towards a tobacco free generation in South Africa!

I declare this 17th World Conference on Tobacco or Health officially open and I wish every delegate a very productive conference.

I thank you!