

Address by Permanent Secretary Helen Royer on behalf of the Honourable Minister for Health and Environment on the Observance of World No Tobacco Day 2015

Fellow Dominicans, every year, on the 31st of May, the World Health Organization and partners mark World No Tobacco Day, highlighting the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocating for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption.

For World No Tobacco Day 2015, as party to the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, Dominica joins the global community in highlighting the public health consequences of tobacco consumption. Dominica will focus on the theme” “**The Harmful Effects of Tobacco: Beware**”

Tobacco is the only legal product which kills its users and non- users when used exactly as prescribed. The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing nearly six million people a year. More than five million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while more than 600, 000 are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke. Approximately

one person dies every six seconds due to tobacco, accounting for one in 10 adult deaths. Up to half of current users will eventually die of a tobacco-related disease.

According to the World Health Organization nearly 80% of the more than one billion smokers worldwide live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest. Tobacco users who die prematurely deprive their families of income, raise the cost of health care and hinder economic development.

The tobacco epidemic is fuelled by false advertising from the Tobacco Industry targeting mainly the youths and females, lack of tight enough fiscal policies and most recently by an upsurge in illicit trade of tobacco products.

In Dominica although smoking is prevalent among adults (the estimation is one in every ten adults), the 2009 survey shows that smoking among students 13-15 years stands at one in four. The Ministry of health is concerned about the high rate of exposure of non-smokers to the dangers of tobacco smoke. The survey also reveals that six of every ten non-smoking students and one of every five adults are exposed to tobacco smoke in public spaces. Clearly the

youths of Dominica are at risk to diseases both caused by their own actions and from the actions of others.

Some conditions which are the results of either direct or indirect tobacco smoke include the following:

- Cancer of the lungs, mouth and throat
- Chronic bronchitis and emphysema
- Heart Disease
- Miscarriages
- Infertility and sexual dysfunction in males and more

The Ministry of Health and Environment acknowledges that it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to protect the health of both smokers and non-smokers from the poisons in tobacco smoke.

The Ministry will be observing a month of activities which will include public education, media discussion, town hall meeting and poetry competition. We encourage the public to participate.

The Ministry of Health and Environment is also in the process of making recommendations to the government to create policies which will contribute to the improvement of the health of the nation.

The public, as a major stakeholder also has important roles to play in:

- Advocacy
- Provision of support to raise awareness on tobacco
- Provision of support to quit tobacco and more.

Conscious of the need to protect the health of our population government has acceded to the request of the Ministry of Health and Environment to increase the tax on tobacco products. And from 2012 there was an increase from 45% to 75% on these products. This is consistent with the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control.

Minister of Health and Environment urges the public to take all the necessary preventive measures to reduce their risks associated to tobacco use.

Thank You.