26 February, 2015 ¦ Geneva – The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) will tomorrow celebrate its 10th anniversary, a milestone marking a decade of action to curb the global tobacco epidemic and promote public health.

The Convention is the first international treaty negotiated under the WHO's auspices, and has become one of the fastest endorsed by the United Nations to date, with 180 Parties, covering 90% of the world's population.

"The WHO Framework Convention stands out as the single most powerful preventive instrument available to public health," says Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization. "We know it works. It averts addiction to a deadly product. It saves lives. Implementation of its provisions brings both an immediate and longer-term reduction in diseases and premature deaths. Increasingly fierce opposition from the tobacco industry is further evidence of how well this treaty works."

During the past decade, the WHO FCTC has enabled Parties to make many significant achievements in tobacco control, including the following:

- 80% of countries have strengthened their tobacco control legislation since becoming Parties;

- The cost of a packet of cigarettes has, on average, increased by 150% among Parties;

- There has been a great increase in the use of graphic health warnings – such warnings cover 75–85% of cigarette packages in many countries and plain packaging initiatives are increasing;
- Many countries have banned smoking in indoor and outdoor public spaces, which has helped to ensure that smoking is no longer seen as socially acceptable;
- Some Parties have set the explicit goal of becoming "tobacco free" (with less than 5% prevalence of tobacco use), including Finland, Ireland and New Zealand, and the Pacific Island countries.

Full implementation of the WHO FCTC would support global commitments to achieving a 25% reduction in premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by 2025, including a 30% reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use in persons aged 15 years and over.

However, the fight against tobacco is far from over. Tobacco companies are still spending billions on advertising. At the same time, they are challenging the implementation of the WHO FCTC and tobacco control laws at national and international courts, and through trade and investment agreements. The use of new products like electronic nicotine delivery systems, and of existing products, like waterpipes, in new settings is gaining in popularity.

"To counter the tobacco lobby's influence, we must stand together against this insidious industry," says Dr Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva, Head of the Convention Secretariat. "We must fight to save the 6 million lives lost each year to tobacco. On this 10th anniversary of the WHO FCTC, we must recommit to further reducing tobacco use because a tobacco-free world is in our reach."

Another issue that remains high on the WHO FCTC's agenda is the illicit tobacco trade, which accounts for one in every 10 cigarettes and many other tobacco products consumed globally. The trade is driven by numerous players, ranging from criminal networks to the tobacco industry.

To respond to this challenge, the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products was adopted in November 2012, although it requires 34 more Parties to become international law. The Protocol is a new international treaty open to all Parties to the WHO FCTC, and aims to tackle smuggling and other kinds of illicit trade, which are a grave danger to public health. The issue has been chosen as the theme for WHO's World No Tobacco Day campaign in 2015.

Link: http://www.who.int/fctc/mediacentre/news/2015/ten_anniversary/en/