

Joint Statement by WCRF International at WHO SEARO 70th Regional Committee Meeting
Agenda item 9.6: Regional action plan to implement global action plan to reduce harmful use of alcohol.

Distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement on behalf of World Cancer Research Fund International, supported by the NCD Alliance, Healthy India Alliance, IOGT International, and Global Alcohol Policy Alliance.

We note with alarm that Member States are far off track to achieve the global target to reduce harmful alcohol use by 10% by 2025, and thus premature mortality from NCDs by 25% by 2025. WCRF's research shows that consuming alcoholic drinks increases the risk of six cancers, including bowel, breast, liver and stomach. In South East Asia recorded alcohol consumption has increased to an estimated annual 4.0 litres of pure alcohol per adult. Increasing per capita alcohol consumption threatens public health and sustainable development across the region.

This year, at the 70th World Health Assembly, Sri Lanka, on behalf of the Region, and supported by countries in other regions, requested the *“Director General to initiate and resource an Expert Committee to report on the alcohol control situation and progress prior to the UN High Level Meeting in 2018”*. This followed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania calling for *WHO to consider the impact of the 2010 Global Alcohol Strategy and ways forward*.

In 2016, Sri Lanka and Thailand supported a call for WHO to assemble a *“thinking group to look at harmful use of alcohol as a factor for NCDs”* and another call for *WHO to study the feasibility of a legally binding global instrument to strengthen alcohol control*. A *“supra national modality similar to the FCTC”* was *“strongly endorsed”* by Sri Lanka. At the World Health Assembly 2016, Sri Lanka, together with Estonia, Botswana, Ecuador and Vietnam, also organised a side event on alcohol marketing, affirming the global reach of this NCD challenge. At the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017, Sri Lanka co-hosted a Side Event on comprehensive approaches to tackle alcohol as obstacle to development.

Yet, despite the lack of progress on alcohol targets and indicators and repeated documented calls from Member States, implementation of evidence-based national alcohol control policies has been inadequate.

Addressing population-wide alcohol use is a key prevention strategy to reducing the burden of cancer and other NCDs; to prevent disability, suffering and premature death; and to support sustainable development.

We call on Member States to implement alcohol control-related best buys contained in WHO's Appendix III. We urge South East Asian Member States to lead on taking forward the WHA calls for more attention to alcohol control and to lead on elevating the harmful use of alcohol as a priority at the forthcoming Executive Board meeting in January 2018, for the sake of health and wider social, environmental and economic development.

Thank you.