**Draft Press Release**

**World No-Tobacco Day 2024**

**Theme: Protecting Children from Tobacco Industry Interference**

As the globe commemorate World No-Tobacco Day, 2024 under the theme ***"Protecting children from tobacco industry interference,"*** Ghana stands at a crucial juncture in its fight against tobacco use, despite the commendable efforts to reduce the use of tobacco., Nicotine, a highly addictive substance, makes products like e-cigarettes and vapes injurious to health, particularly to the developing brains of young people when they are exposed to it. Despite the claim by the tobacco industry that these products are safer alternatives, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other global tobacco industry organization has, warned that these new products pose a grave threat to children and young people, and tobacco control efforts. The recent WHO report "Hooking the Next Generation" highlights manipulative tactics by the tobacco industry, including the use of digital media and child-friendly flavors to attract young users.

The affordability and accessibility of cigarettes include e-cigarettes, in recent times is encouraging underage smoking and perpetuating addiction among the youth. The country is still facing difficulties in regulating the ban of single sale of cigarettes on the Ghanaian market increasing and exposing children and young people to these products. This easy access demands immediate attention and stringent enforcement of existing laws. Jorge Alday, Director of STOP at Vital Strategies, emphasized the industry's relentless pursuit of profit at the expense of public health: “The terrible truth is that eight million people every year die from tobacco use. The single greatest cause for these deaths is a vast industry that works relentlessly to sell products that are essentially poison.” He underscored the urgency of acting now to regulate or ban harmful products like e-cigarettes to protect future generations.

A recent study commissioned by Vision for Alternative Development-Ghana (VALD Ghana) and conducted by Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) highlights the prevalence and societal perceptions of non-combustible electronic tobacco products like vaping, e-cigarette, and new emerging tobacco and nicotine products, providing a foundation for developing policies to protect public health. The report reveal that the industry is aggressively marketing e-cigarettes and vapes using online and digital platforms.

Despite laws banning smoking in public places, the practice remains prevalent, normalizing tobacco use and exposing non-smokers to secondhand smoke. The absence of regulations on smoking in movies further undermines public health initiatives. Implementing measures to limit such portrayals is crucial to protecting youth from adopting hazardous habits.

The trend of shisha smoking, particularly among young people, is alarming and has huge health effects. Research indicates that a single shisha session can be equivalent to smoking 100 to 200 sticks of cigarettes, which makes shisha use more devastating to health. The 2017 Ghana Youth Tobacco Survey showed 1.7% of girls compared to 0.4% of boys smoked shisha, posing significant health risks and acting as a precursor to future cigarette use.

Ruediger Krech, Director of Health Promotion at WHO at an event recently highlighted the industry's exploitation of digital and social media, delivery apps, and other innovative ways to reach children. He noted that child-friendly flavored e-cigarettes combined with sleek and colorful designs that resemble toys are blatant attempts to addict young people to harmful products. “Currently, we have about 16,000 flavors that are very appealing to children and young people—fruity flavors, candy, bubble gum and vanilla ice-cream,” he said.

VALD-Ghana on this day urged stakeholders to emphasize the need for transparent, robust regulatory approaches at national, regional, and global levels. Advocacy efforts should focus on protecting children and young people from the harms of tobacco and nicotine products, aligning with WHO's call to action on electronic cigarettes. It is crucial to scrutinize and remain vigilant against groups promoting industry-friendly policies.

Urgent action is needed to prevent the uptake of e-cigarettes, which are harmful to health, especially for children, smokers and non-smokers.

VALD-Ghana strongly continue to advocate for a ban of these products, which offer no public health benefits.

The inconsistency in regulations, where the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) taxes e-cigarettes while the FDA confiscates them, underscores the need for clear policies.

The theme of this year's World No-Tobacco Day is directly linked with broader issues of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and universal health coverage (UHC). By focusing on preventing early tobacco use, public health education, policy advocacy, and holding the industry accountable, we can address a significant contributor to the global NCD burden and support the goals of UHC.

As we observe World No-Tobacco Day, the Vision for Alternative Development-Ghana urges all stakeholders government agencies, civil society, media and the public to renew their commitment to the fight against a product that has no known benefits, instead kills, inflicts permanent disabilities and chronic diseases such as cancer, lung and heart diseases etc.

By taking action, Ghana can better protect its population, especially its children and young people from the harms of e-cigarettes.

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**About World No-Tobacco Day**

World No-Tobacco Day is observed globally on May 31st each year to raise awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use and advocate for effective policies to reduce consumption. Established by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1987, the annual event promotes tobacco control measures and supports individuals in their journey towards a tobacco-free life.