

THE WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

L'ASSOCIATION MEDICALE MONDIALE, INC

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WHO Round table meeting with representatives of nongovernmental organizations and health professionals on ways they could contribute to reducing harmful use of alcohol Geneva 24 - 25 November 2008

WMA GENERAL STATEMENT

The World Medical Associations (WMA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to WHO consultation on ways of reducing use of alcohol and reiterates its genuine willingness to engage in the fight against the harmful use of alcohol worldwide.

The WMA has a long-standing commitment towards the reduction of the harmful impact of alcohol on health and society. In 2005, the Association adopted a **Statement on Reducing the Global Impact of Alcohol on Health and Society**, stressing the causal relationships between alcohol consumption and more than 60 types of disease and injury including traffic fatalities. Alcohol consumption is the leading risk factor for disease burden in low mortality developing countries and the third largest risk factor in developed countries.

The WMA denounces the fact that, in recent years, some constraints on the production, mass marketing and patterns of consumption of alcohol have been weakened and have resulted in increased availability and accessibility of alcoholic beverages and changes in drinking patterns across the world. This has created a global health problem that urgently requires governmental, citizen, medical and health care intervention.

The WMA believes that **population-based approaches** affecting the social drinking environment and the availability of alcoholic beverages are more effective than individual approaches (such as education) for preventing alcohol related problems and illness - however not excluding one another. Alcohol policies that affect drinking patterns by limiting access and by discouraging drinking by young people through setting a minimum legal provision age are especially likely to reduce harms. Laws to reduce permitted blood alcohol levels for drivers and to control the number of sales outlets have been effective in lowering alcohol problems.

Through its members active in all the continents at local, regional and national levels, the WMA can be a powerful instrument to develop and coordinate global actions in the medical field to reduce the harmful use of alcohol with the full involvement of physicians.

Highlights of the recommendations of the WMA:

The WMA urges National Medical Associations and all physicians to take the following actions to help reduce the impact of alcohol on health and society:

1. To advocate for comprehensive national policies that include measures to educate the public about the dangers of unsafe and unhealthy use of alcohol, including, but not limited to, education programs targeted specifically at youth;
2. To promote **national policies that follow 'best practices' from the developed countries**, which, with appropriate modification, could also be effective in developing nations. These may include setting of a minimum legal age for the provision of alcohol to young people, restricted sales policies, restricting hours or days of sale and the number of sales outlets, or increasing alcohol taxes
3. Physicians should also advocate for the **restriction of the promotion, advertising and provision of alcohol to youth** so that young people can grow up with fewer social pressures or inducements to consume alcohol
4. The development of **partnerships** with other concerned civil society groups in this area should be promoted for example in the workplace, and when driving, or in schools.
5. Physicians are urged **to screen patients for alcohol use disorders and at-risk drinking**, and to provide specialized treatment and rehabilitation for alcohol-dependent individuals and assistance to their families.
6. Finally, WMA recommends promoting consideration of a **Framework Convention on Alcohol Control** similar to that of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control that took effect in 2005.

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