

Tobacco kills nearly 6 million people a year globally: WHO

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Countries are constantly defining ways to curb tobacco consumption.

These measures together with strong pictorial warnings have brought substantial health care gains.

"Tobacco kills nearly 6 million people each year, globally. Unless we act now, the epidemic will kill over 8 million people every year by 2030. More than 80% of these preventable deaths would occur in low- and middle-income countries," said Dr Poonam Singh, WHO regional director, South-East Asia.

However, illicit trade undermines tobacco control policy efforts and facilitates increased uptake of tobacco by youth and adults from low-income groups by making tobacco products more affordable and accessible, particularly to those from low-income groups.

"And because these products are not subject to legal restrictions and effective health regulations aimed at curbing tobacco

use, such as pictorial warnings or banning sales to minors, this is fuelling the tobacco epidemic," Dr Poonam added.

In the South-East Asia Region, many countries have porous borders that provide easy opportunity for the smuggling of tobacco products.

All South-East Asian countries have enacted stringent laws to control tobacco consumption - both on pricing and sale of tobacco products in-country as well as against import of foreign brands - and despite these efforts, there is still a thriving trade in smuggled tobacco products.

In a bid to respond to growing illegal trade in tobacco products and to make a consolidated effort to put a break in this cycle of illegal transactions, The Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco products was developed.

This international treaty was negotiated by the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), and was adopted by them in November 2012.

WHO urges all Member States to speed up their process of ratifying or acceding to the Protocol.

"Ratification of the Protocol is necessary to respond to the financial, legal and health impacts of illicit trade in tobacco products," concluded Dr Poonam.