

World No Tobacco Day targets habit that 'breaks hearts': WHO

Spreading the message that tobacco causes deadly illnesses such as heart disease and stroke helps prevent “needless” loss of life, United Nations health experts said on Thursday.

Coinciding with [World No Tobacco Day 2018](#), observed each 31 May, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) is warning that tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke are “major causes” of cardiovascular disease, contributing to three million deaths a year.

The lack of awareness about the risks of tobacco use, is most common in low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO's [Global Report on Trends in Prevalence of Tobacco Smoking 2000-2025](#).

The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done – *Dr. Douglas Bettcher (WHO)*

In China, for example, more than six out of 10 people are unaware that smoking can cause a heart attack.

In India and Indonesia, meanwhile, more than half of all adults do not know that the habit can lead to a stroke.

Dr. Douglas Bettcher, Director, Department for the Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases at WHO, told journalists in Geneva that tobacco use is falling globally but it still kills more than seven million people a year.

Progress is uneven in protecting consumers from the tobacco industry, Dr. Bettcher added, explaining that higher income countries are making “faster progress” than their poorer counterparts at protecting consumers, partly owing to stronger regulations.

Latest data from the WHO report indicates that there are around 1.1 billion smokers in the world today – the same number as at the turn of the century.

Despite the apparent lack of progress in tackling the total number of smokers, the report highlights that only one in five people smoke today, compared to more than one in four, 18 years ago. This decline is masked by the world's growing population, Dr. Bettcher said.

Commenting on efforts to encourage people to quit, the UN health expert warned that only around 12 per cent countries are on track to meet global targets to reduce by one-third the number of people dying from non-communicable diseases by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

In a bid to promote heart health, the WHO wants every one of its 194 Member States to implement a series of increasingly strict tobacco control measures.

These include making indoor public and workplaces smoke-free and insisting that tobacco packaging carries warnings that demonstrate the health risks for users.

“The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done,” Dr. Bettcher said.

He named Ireland and Uruguay as countries which had achieved the highest level of tobacco control before adding that since 2007, the number of people around the world to have benefited from these measures has more than quadrupled, from one billion to five billion.

World needs generation of self-empowered ‘superheroes’, UN youth forum told

The world needs young people who dream big and can endure both failure and pain, a Tongan Olympic idol told a gathering of youth at the United Nations on Wednesday.

“The world does not need violence, does not need bombs, the world needs today’s youth to become superheroes,” said Pita Taufatofua, the Tongan athlete who became a “superhero” himself two years ago when he marched shirtless, carrying his country’s flag during the opening ceremony of the Rio Olympic Games.

At the UN, wearing a shirt, he said his brother advised him to “keep your shirt on and leave oil at home”.

The second piece of advice from his brother was, “tell your truth, leave the youth with something they can take into the future,” Mr. Taufatofua said.

One day in his childhood, he was coming home with his father, expecting that a superhero outfit was waiting for him at home. But there was nothing waiting for him. “That was my first experience of disappointment,” he said.

So what do people do when they get disappointed, he asked.

“They minimize their expectations of themselves because that’s how we reduce pain,” he said. “Unfortunately, with minimizing expectations, we also minimize our potential to achieve our dreams and goals.”

The formula for becoming a superhero is to have the ability to deal with failures and pains and to dream big, he said.

He dreamt of becoming an Olympian when he was 12. That dream never left him. After 20 years of pain, his dream finally came true in Rio.

Now 36, he was one of the many speakers invited to today's event, titled [Youth Dialogue](#), which was held to bring the United Nations closer to young people.

(Check out our exclusive interview with [Pita Taufatofua](#) here)

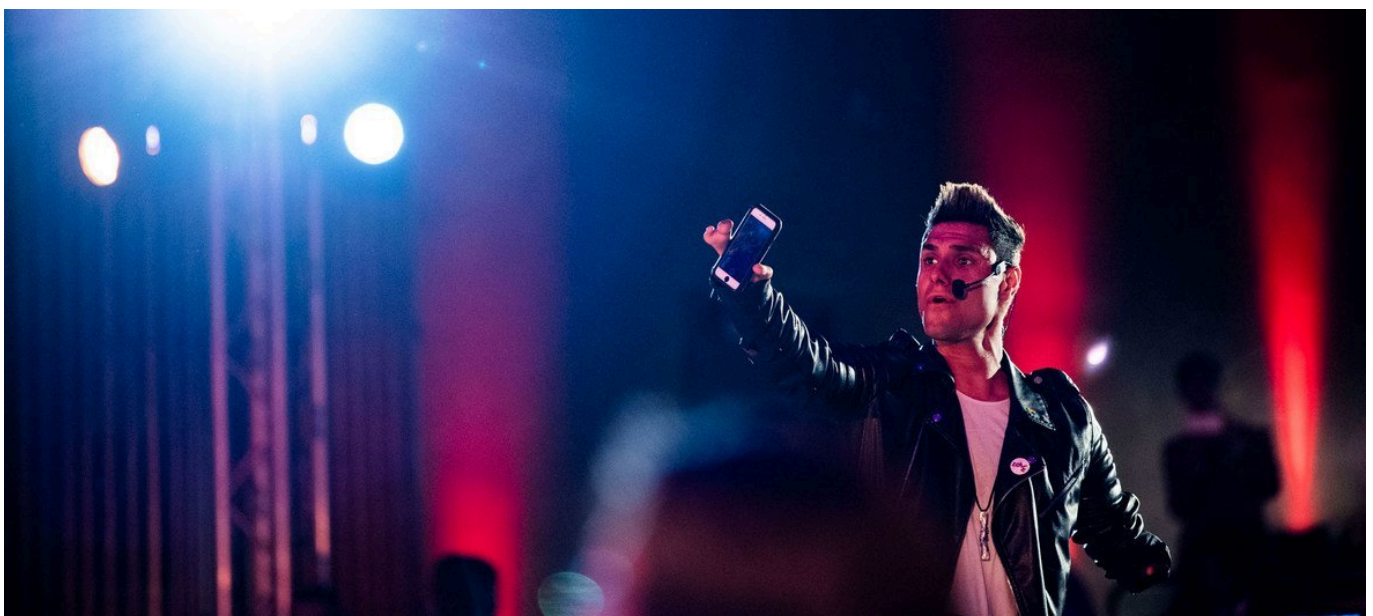
The one-day event sought to highlight the ideas, needs and concerns of young people on education and employment, as well as how to prevent radicalization of youth.

"They still feel they are excluded, from the decisions that are affecting their lives. They are not invited to the table where they are supposed to be. Quite often, they have a feeling that when they speak no one is listening," said [Miroslav Lajčák](#), the President of the UN General Assembly, explaining that this is why he hosted the event.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General's [Envoy on Youth](#), said most mainstream media appears to be "on a mission" to create an image of young people as a generation of careless or lazy individuals, who, if not managed well, could turn into a threat or burden to a country.

However, that is not the case, she argued: "If we are to realistically achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is our generation who is going to do this. We are the SDG generation. The rest of the world can try, but they can't, or won't, make it without [us]."

Otherwise known as the Global Goals, the SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Singer Emmanuel Kelly performs during the General Assembly Youth Dialogue at UN Headquarters in New York.

Other speakers included Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development; Mari Malek, model, disc jockey and founder of “Stand For Education” and singer Emmanuel Kelly.

[Tonga's flamboyant Olympic flag-bearer brings his inspiring message to the UN](#)

He is best known for his bare-chested appearances at the Rio and Pyeongchang Olympic Games, but Pita Taufatofua now wants to use his social media muscle to empower youth, and get them to share their stories.

“The young people are the people who are going to dictate our future,” Mr. Taufatofua said in an interview with UN News during his first visit to the United Nations in New York.

The two-time Olympian was one of the main speakers at Tuesday's [United Nations Youth Dialogue](#) event, where the President of the General Assembly and other senior officials joined young people to discuss increasing education and skills training, as well as how to prevent radicalization.

“If we can give them ideas and present knowledge in a way that helps them, as they grow up and work through their careers, then that's going to affect all of us,” he said.

The 34-year-old has worked with homeless teenagers on the Pacific island for the past 15 years.

He said that seeing their struggles has taught him the importance of listening and encouraging young people, even helping them achieve small victories, so they feel more confident.

“You can have a young child go through the most horrendous conditions and come out on top,” said Mr. Taufatofua.

Empowering youth also comes through education, he said, but stressed that children need to be taught how to think – not what to think: “When they're taught to have a dialogue with each other, different points of view, but still be friends after, that's education.”

Interacting with others and remaining focused, is a skill that athletes have to learn, Mr. Taufatofua said, praising the value that sport brings to diplomacy and promoting sustainable development. He pointed to the improved relations between the two Koreas following the Winter Olympics in South Korea earlier this year.

“It allows people to interact in a way that can be sports-like conflict according to a set of rules, so you’re in competition, and then you go out and have a coconut together. What other avenues can you compete and then share stories together?”

Born in Australia, but raised in Tonga, Mr. Taufatofua built up his strength lifting heavy cassava and potatoes off the ground, under his father’s watchful eye, who wanted him to learn the value of hard work. He went on to get an engineering degree and is now working towards his Master’s degree.

Mr. Taufatofua says his heart is always in Tonga, regardless of where he is. This respect for his country and its people is what pushed him to wear a traditional outfit for the opening ceremonies at the Olympics – despite being repeatedly told he should wear a suit and jacket.

“The message is that you can be you, you can be unique, you can be a representation of your country but still intermingle and be peaceful with other countries,” he said.

“I’m representing thousands of years of voyaging, of being a Polynesian, of going across the sea and not knowing where you’ll stop. I feel that everyone who marches out should represent their nation, the future of their nation, the struggles of their nature.”

[UN rights chief urges action in Mexico to end ‘outrageous’ wave of disappearances](#)

Authorities in Mexico are being urged to act to end what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has described as [“a wave of enforced disappearances”](#) in the city of Nuevo Laredo, amid “strong indications” that federal security forces may be involved.

A local human rights organization in the city, which is located near the border with Texas, in the United States, estimates there have been at least 40 disappearances from February of this year through to mid-May.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Office in Mexico has documented the

disappearance of 21 men and two women during the same period.

“Many of these people are reported to have been arbitrarily detained and disappeared while going about their daily lives. It is particularly horrific that at least five of the victims are minors, with three of them as young as 14,” said UN rights chief Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a press statement issued on Wednesday.

“These crimes, perpetrated over four months in a single municipality, are outrageous.”

His Office in Mexico has received testimony stating that the incidents were perpetrated by federal security officials, often late at night or around dawn.

Uniformed personnel reportedly detained people as they walked or drove along public roads, according to the statement, while several burnt out and bullet-ridden vehicles have been found by the roadside.

Zeid noted that “despite ample information and evidence”, the Mexican authorities have made little progress in locating the disappeared people and investigating what happened to them.

Some families have undertaken their own searches, discovering the bodies of at least six victims.

Several witnesses have been subjected to threats, and one was “disappeared” for two days before being released, the statement continued.

Zeid further stated that it was “extremely worrying” that the incidents are taking place just months after Mexico adopted a new General Law on Disappearances.

“What has been happening in Nuevo Laredo is a litmus test of whether this new law actually represents the change its adoption promises, or whether enforced disappearances, followed by impunity and a lack of reparation to the victims, will continue,” the UN rights chief said.

[Mali: In Mopti, UN chief urges support for ‘G5’ countries fighting terrorism in Sahel region](#)

On the second day of his visit to Mali, United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) travelled some 460 kilometers outside the capital, Bamako,

to Mopti, where he made a strong appeal for more predictable financial support to the regional force tackling terrorist threats in the region.

Shortly after arriving in Mopti, on Wednesday, Mr. Guterres went to nearby Sévaré, where he visited the G5 Sahel Force Base.

Set up by Burkina-Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, neighbouring countries in the vast Sahel region – an area lying south of the Sahara Desert and stretching east to west across the breadth of the African continent – the Force aims strengthen the fight against threats to peace and security and bolster development.

“I would like to congratulate all the women and men who make up the G-5 Sahel Force for the way they are determined to build this project and to protect the civilian populations of the region, and at the same time they ensure the security of the entire international community in the face of the threat of terrorism and organized crime that is proliferating in this part of the world,” the Secretary-General told the press on the scene.

Adding that the UN has proposed secure funding options that would allow the Force to better plan its operations, he said: “We have not achieved all the goals we have set ourselves to better support the G5 Sahel Force. But we will do our best.”

“We will make a very strong plea to the international community so that the G5 Sahel can have the financial and material resources necessary for its effectiveness,” Mr. Guterres said.

“We are asking the international community for a big investment for the development of the region, for the development of the Sahel, because there is no peace without security and there is no development without peace.”

UN chief visits Grand Mosque



UN Photo/Marco Dormino

UN Secretary-General António Guterres visits the Grand Mosque in Mopti, Mali.

After visiting Sévaré, Mr. Guterres returned to Mopti where he met the Imam at the city's Grand Mosque. With his delegation, which included Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the head of UN peacekeeping operations, the Secretary-General talked with the Imam and the local civil society, focused mainly on the humanitarian and security situation in the region.

During his trip to Mali during the Ramadan period, the Secretary-General fasted in solidarity with Muslims around the world.

UN News has a multimedia team travelling with Mr. Guterres and we will be bringing you a full report from them, later in the day.