31st May is World No Tobacco Day and it is a special occasion to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and to advocate for programs and policies to reduce tobacco use in the population.

The theme ‘Get ready for plain packaging’ has been chosen for World No Tobacco Day this year by the World Health Organisation as an important measure towards reducing the demand for tobacco products and related disease and death in populations”.

Seychelles has implemented strong policy against tobacco since several decades. This includes the Tobacco Control Act enacted in 2009, which prohibits smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces as well as on all public transport, and prohibits tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Furthermore, Seychelles applies high tax on tobacco products, a main measure to reduce cigarettes consumption, as advocated by the World Health Organization. It is remarkable that all these measures were broadly supported by the general public, as well as by a majority of smokers themselves. These measures are generally well implemented. They have contributed towards decreasing tobacco prevalence that has been observed in Seychelles during the past years.

I am glad to declare that we have moved forward with a regulation that requests that all cigarette packets should display a large pictorial health warning. This measure will come into force in December 2016. This means that all cigarette packets will need to include a text message and a color picture that covers at least 50% of the two main sides of the cigarette packets, in line with the Seychelles Tobacco Control Act. The overall aim is to provide clear information about the health hazards of smoking to all tobacco users and hopefully motivate them to quit smoking.

I am therefore calling upon all the partners involved in producing, importing, and selling cigarettes and other tobacco products in the country to ensure that health warnings are displayed on all cigarette packets as prescribed by the law.

As a forward looking country, soon we will also be focusing on the implementation of plain packaging on cigarettes packets. Plain packaging aims to reduce the appeal of tobacco products, increase the impact of health warnings, and removes messages from the tobacco industry that mislead consumers about the harms of smoking. This measure is being successfully implemented in a few countries, such as Australia, France, United Kingdom.

As we continue the fight against smoking, which kills one life-long consumer out of two, we reiterate our plea to smokers to refrain from smoking on World No Tobacco Day and try to sustain this effort over the life time.

Tobacco use remains a major Non communicable disease risk factor and it is our individual responsibility to put this risk under control once and for all. Our health is our responsibility. Let me also thank all persons and organizations who have relentlessly spearheaded their efforts towards tobacco free Seychelles.