Minister’s message for World No Tobacco Day 2018

Today, 31st May, we celebrate World No Tobacco Day and we ask smokers of all countries in the world to quit smoking for the day and, hopefully forever. It is also an opportunity to reflect on what we have done and what we can do to further reduce tobacco use in the population.

With 7 million deaths worldwide, tobacco use is and remains the leading preventable risk factor for the development of both cardiovascular disease and cancer and smoking places a heavy health, social and economic burden for the country.

The theme of World No Tobacco Day this year is "Tobacco and Heart Disease". This theme aims at highlighting the impact tobacco has on cardiovascular health and at reminding of the several public health measures that Governments and the society at large should take to promote health by reducing tobacco use at national level.

Over the past three decades, Seychelles has established several programs and policies to protect the health of our people against tobacco use. This includes a comprehensive legislation enacted in 2009 that bans smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces and on all public transports and bans all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. The legislation also requests that cigarette packets sold display a text message and a colour picture that covers at least 50% of the main sides of the packets. High taxes on tobacco products are applied to reduce the demand, in line with recommendations of the Framework Convention of Tobacco Control that Seychelles and 180 other countries have ratified.

These measures have been instrumental in curbing the prevalence of smoking observed since a few years in Seychelles in both adults and in children and we note with great satisfaction that the age-adjusted mortality rates of cardiovascular diseases and cancer are on the decrease in the Seychelles. We also note that in the Youth health Survey done in 2015, tobacco use among adolescents is also falling slightly. This good news should however not make us forget that cardiovascular diseases and cancer are still the leading causes of mortality in Seychelles and we should therefore strengthen actions to further reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease and cancer.
We must now ensure a strict enforcement of the ban on smoking in enclosed public and work places, including spot fines for those who do not comply. We must consider introducing plain packaging on tobacco packets to reduce the attractiveness, as advised by the World Health Organization and successfully implemented in several countries. We must stop selling cigarettes by single units as this facilitates consumption of cigarettes, especially among the youth. We also need to take further measures to fight illicit tobacco products, including by ratifying the related protocol.

We will also continue to encourage people to engage in regular exercise as part of living full, healthy and productive lives.

As Government is committed to continue the fight against tobacco use, I also encourage every nonsmoker to abstain from taking up smoking and every smoker to quit the habit in order to protect their health as well as the health of the people exposed to second-hand smoke. I call on every citizen, on this World No Tobacco Day, to work together toward a smoke free environment that will benefit both the health of all our people and the pristine and unique environment of our country.