Statement by Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization

More than ten years have passed since the adoption of the **European Union** (EU) **Tobacco Products Directive** in 2001. The EU has long been a frontrunner in tobacco control. The 2001 Directive was adopted even before consensus was reached on the text of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in 2003. The EU further showed its resolve to protect its citizens from the harms of tobacco use by ratifying the FCTC in 2005, the same year it came into force. However, in the intervening years, several market, scientific and international developments in the tobacco control sector have revealed a number of weaknesses, gaps and loopholes in the existing 2001 Directive rules.

Each year, tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke claim well more than 700 000 lives in European Union. As Party to the Treaty, the European Union has an obligation to strengthen its tobacco control legislation to reflect its international commitments. Parties to the treaty are obliged over time to take a number of steps to reduce demand and supply for tobacco products including: protecting people from exposure to tobacco smoke; counteracting illicit trade; banning advertising, promotion and sponsorship; banning sales to minors; putting large health warnings on packages of tobacco; increasing tobacco taxes and creating a national coordinating mechanism for tobacco control.

Over the past months, the European Parliament's Committee for the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety has worked intensively to update and complete the 2001 Directive. The ongoing revision process of the EU Tobacco Products Directive is an excellent opportunity to align with the obligations under the WHO FCTC. I am heartened to note that the current Directive draft is responsive to the health concerns of Europeans related to the tobacco epidemic, especially as studies show that the European public also supports strong tobacco control policies. I hope to see the same support from the legislators to the final legislative report during the next plenary session of the European Parliament.

A strong EU Tobacco Products Directive would not only help save lives and protect young people from addiction, but will also signal to the world that the EU can continue to be seen as a strong ally in the fight against the tobacco epidemic. This is an epidemic which claimed an estimated 100 million lives during the previous century, and which could claim a billion more lives in the 21st century if countries do not implement the measures called for in the WHO FCTC.

In the case of the EU Directive, the tobacco industry is, once again, making an extraordinary effort to keep its products from being regulated, precisely because regulation works so well to reduce the vast harm caused by tobacco products. The tobacco industry is, once again, using an arsenal of economic arguments, precisely because such arguments are so effective in shifting the emphasis away from health, especially in times of financial austerity.

I strongly encourage EU parliamentarians to remain steadfast in the midst of these pressures. In our shared zeal to abate the entirely avoidable deaths and diseases brought on by tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke, Europeans who are concerned about the toll of the tobacco epidemic and all of us in the public health community are urging you to hear our collective voices as we call on you to support the adoption of the Tobacco Products Directive.

WHO stands ready to support the process and the future steps which will be necessary to implement the new European Tobacco Products Directive.