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Addressing:
73rd Session of the World Health Assembly,
Virtual, de minimis meeting,
Agenda item 3,
May 18, 2020

**Movendi International Official Statement
WHA73 Agenda item 3
Address by WHO DG on COVID-19 Pandemic**

Movendi International stands with WHO in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and supports the commitment to science, solutions, and solidarity in fighting the current public health crisis. Heads of State, policy makers, and civil society must unite in support for WHO's crucial leading role.

The COVID-19 public health crisis illustrates the importance and urgency of investing in health promotion and in the prevention of risk factors for ill-health, such as alcohol and tobacco.

Health systems have been heavily burdened and strained already before the current pandemic, and resources for comprehensive healthcare have been depleted. The novel coronavirus has brought this reality into sharp view. It is therefore important to prioritize addressing health risk factors for emergency preparedness, for health system sustainability and for the overall health and well-being of populations. Therefore, the members of Movendi International welcome the commitment of Member States to maintain continued functioning of health systems to tackle the pandemic and other epidemics. We also welcome the recognition of vulnerable populations including those with pre-existing conditions like cancer, mental ill-health and other NCDs.

As Member States develop national COVID-19 action plans, we urge governments to integrate measures to:

- Mitigate the unintended consequences of lockdowns on risk factors particularly tobacco and alcohol use, as these jeopardize the efficacy of public health measures and health system functioning and fuel the disease burden.

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- Use recovery plans to advance universal health coverage. The global focus on health provides an opportunity to make progress towards reaching health for all.
- Act on the lessons learned, especially regarding the importance of domestic resource mobilization and investments in UHC through taxation of health-harmful products.
- Institute more comprehensive and coherent approaches to protecting the health of populations. Emerging evidence indicates that people with substance use disorders or people in recovery from such disorders have not received adequate attention during the pandemic, leading to avoidable disability, and likely fueling waves of alcohol harm in the aftermath of the pandemic. Not alcohol retail is essential but services and care for people with alcohol problems.

We welcome the Resolution and its references to other major public health problems and epidemics and call on Member States to fund research and focused responses to the relationship between COVID-19 and risk factors such as alcohol. We need leadership in global health now more than ever. Only together can we overcome this pandemic.

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