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OFFICIAL STATEMENT

RC70 AGENDA ITEM:

THE WORK OF THE WHO IN THE AFRICAN REGION 2019-2020:

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

18.08.2020

Movendi International and our 57 Member Organizations from 22 African countries congratulate the Regional Director on the report and for impressive progress made in the last year, especially considering the coronavirus crisis.

As members of Movendi International, we are the activists that promote health and development for all in our communities across Africa. We collaborate with country offices, ministries of health and other partners and we galvanize support from international partners. As such we have concrete insights regarding the impact and potential of the transformation agenda on the ground.

We welcome the Regional Office's effort to help member states review and strengthen their responses to the alcohol burden. We also welcome the highlighting of alcohol prevention and control as key aspect of improving road safety across the African region.

At the same time, we are convinced that the case of pervasive alcohol harm in our communities, countries and continent elucidates the vast room for improvement. The need for technical capacity building in alcohol prevention and control is urgent and has been articulated by member states, but remains unmet - for instance concerning alcohol taxation to finance health for all and sustainable development. We remain deeply concerned about the harmful impact of the alcohol industry across our region. The revelations of the book "Heineken in Africa" should compel the Regional Office to increase efforts to support Member States in safeguarding against conflicts of interest and alcohol industry interference in efforts to prevent and reduce alcohol harm.

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As social movement for development through alcohol prevention, we strongly support the Regional Office's effort to identify priority interventions to accelerate action towards Universal Health Coverage. If anything, the global pandemic has brought into sharp focus the importance of health risk factor prevention, especially alcohol - to ease their already heavy burden on health systems. What has unfolded in recent months shows that alcohol prevention and control should be made a program priority requiring additional engagement and support by WHO in our region and by our governments. Addressing the extremely cheap alcohol prices, the extremely wide and easy availability of alcohol and the aggressive alcohol marketing in our region

- would improve health and development,
- would protect the majority of African adults who abstain from alcohol,
- would ease the strain on health systems due to heavy alcohol harm, and would generate resources for investing into UHC and health system development.

Therefore, we urge Member States and the Regional Office to step up action on alcohol prevention and control.

On global level, Member States decided earlier this year to call for accelerated action on alcohol harm and to call alcohol a public health priority. If anything, the coronavirus crisis should lend even more urgency to this work – as many African countries can attest. Therefore, we call for renewed efforts to improve member states' core capacities to implement the WHO SAFER technical package, the WHO Global Alcohol Strategy, and the alcohol policy best buy solutions.

In this spirit and to this end, we stand ready to extend our support for and partnership with WHO country offices across the region.

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