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## WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY: 31 May 2010

### The Union works to prevent tobacco use among Chinese women and advance tobacco control initiatives

PRESS RELEASE

**Beijing (May 28 2010)** — Smoking-related diseases kill around 1 million people each year in China, home to some 325 million smokers. While China has signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, and some cities are moving towards enacting smokefree legislation, China remains the world's largest market for tobacco products. And, since the male market is nearly saturated, China's 650 million women are becoming an increasingly attractive opportunity for the tobacco industry. **The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)**, which has had an office in Beijing since 2006, is working closely with the government and local non-governmental organisations to prevent this impending public health disaster.

On **World No Tobacco Day, 31 May 2010**, The Union and its partners across China are calling for recognition of this danger to women, who traditionally take up smoking at much lower rates than men, and currently comprise about 6% of Chinese smokers. To raise global awareness of this issue, the World Health Organization chose "**Gender and Women with an emphasis on marketing to women**" as the theme for World No Tobacco Day 2010. Supported by The Union, the Tobacco Control Office of the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention has also focuses on the issue of gender in its 2010 National Report on Tobacco Control.

Feminine elements can be seen more and more often in tobacco promotion across China, especially on cigarette packaging. The color and design of the packaging and the shape of the cigarettes are reminiscent of Western brands, such as Virginia Slims, which became famous in the late 60s and 70s for its "feminist" slogan "You've come a long way, baby". The Chinese tobacco industry is also heavily promoting "low-tar" cigarettes, which are falsely promoted as less harmful and packaged in light colours. Both the design of the packaging and the implied health message seem intended to appeal to women in particular.

A national survey in 2005 showed that the smoking rate among young Chinese women had already increased compared to 1996. Public health advocates believe measures need to be put in place immediately to ban the advertising and promotion of tobacco products in China before smoking among women reaches epidemic level.

“China is at a crucial turning point”, said **Dr Lin Yan, Director of The Union China Country Office in Beijing**. “Women are more conscious than ever of their own social identity, and to many, especially urban white-collar women, smoking seems to be a perfect way to exhibit and justify this identity”.

However, Dr Lin also sees significant progress being made with growing awareness of the terrible toll that tobacco is taking on China. “A few years ago, a smokefree China was unimaginable. Today it is not”, he said. He cited several examples of the advances being made with The Union’s support:

- Guangzhou, a city of close to 10 million, recently passed the country’s most comprehensive smokefree legislation.
- Seven additional cities – Tianjin, Chongqing, Harbin, Shenyang, Nanchang, Lanzhou and Shenzhen – have begun work on tobacco control legislation with support from the China CDC and The Union.
- The success of China’s smokefree Olympics in six Olympic cities raised considerable public awareness and political momentum that continues to further tobacco control initiatives throughout the country.

Smokefree policies are crucial in protecting women from the dangers of tobacco use. They discourage people from starting to use tobacco, and they protect the entire population from the dangers of second-hand smoke. Around the world, significantly higher numbers of women – 384,000 each year – die from second-hand smoke than men. In China, more than half of women of reproductive age are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke. The Union’s efforts around the country are seeking to reduce this potentially tragic statistic.

To mark the World No Tobacco Day and highlight the danger to women, The Union is joining with partners to carry out the following activities:

- In Beijing, the Tobacco Control Office at China CDC will release its annual Tobacco Control Report on 28 May; this year’s report is titled “Gender and Women with an emphasis on marketing to women.”

- In Shanghai, Fudan University will publicise the progress of Smokefree Expo prior to 31 May and will also organise a press conference on the enforcement of the new smokefree regulation in Shanghai around 31 May.
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### **About The Union**

The mission of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) is to bring innovation, expertise, solutions and support to address health challenges in low- and middle-income populations. Founded in 1920, The Union today is both a non-profit institute with five scientific departments and 14 offices worldwide and a federation of close to 3,000 organisations and individuals who are committed to the same goals. The Union headquarters are in Paris, and offices serve the Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and South-East Asia regions. Its scientific departments focus on tuberculosis, HIV, lung health and non-communicable diseases, tobacco control and research; and each engages in research, provides technical assistance and offers training and other capacity-building activities leading to health solutions for the poor. [www.theunion.org](http://www.theunion.org)

- To learn more about The Union's tobacco control activities, please visit our website in Chinese: [www.tobaccofreeunion.org](http://www.tobaccofreeunion.org)
- To contact The Union China Country Office in Beijing, please write [uco@theunion.org](mailto:uco@theunion.org)

### **About the Year of the Lung 2010**

The Year of the Lung 2010 is a campaign launched by the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) to build awareness of the essential role the lungs play in health and the toll taken by lung diseases. For more information, please visit [www.yearofthelung.org](http://www.yearofthelung.org)