Today Uganda joins the rest of the world in recognising the devastating effects of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke on human lives.

This year’s WHTF is being commemorated at a time when the Tobacco Control Bill has been tabled before parliament for debate. It also coincides with a health awareness campaign facilitated by the Center for Health, Environment and Research Development (CEHRUD) in four Universities of Makerere University, Uganda Christian University, Kampala Internal University and Nkumba University Funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Uganda Country office.

The campaign is based on findings from a survey done in the four Universities in 2013. The survey discovered that at least 50% of university students had no information as to what causes Non Communicable diseases. It should be noted that Tobacco is the leading cause of NCDs. And that majority of smokers in the world today begin smoking long before they are 18 years of age. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 75 percent of premature deaths in adults are the result of behaviors begun during adolescence and youth. Behavioral researchers on Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) have also established that behaviors associated with two of the key risk factors for NCDs—tobacco and alcohol—are likely to start or become established during adolescence.

In 2006, the Uganda Demographic Health Survey established that 22% and 4% of Uganda’s adult males and females between the ages of 15-49 respectively are habitual smokers, while the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYS) of 2010 stated that 15% of boys and 13% of girls in secondary schools start smoking annually. In 2011, WHO-Country NCD profile estimated Uganda’s mortality due to NCDs at 64/1000 for males and 42/1000 for females and reported a daily tobacco smoke rate of 12.3% among males and 1.5% among females.

In the same year GYS reported that 15% of boys and 6% of girls (10-14 years) of school-going age, are unable to join schools in tobacco-growing areas because they are working in Tobacco FHDs. As a party to the WHO Framework work Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), Uganda is obliged to put in place and implement tax and price policies on tobacco products as a way to reduce tobacco consumption. Research has proven that increasing taxes on tobacco products effectively reduces consumption of tobacco products among poor people and acts as a deterrent to young people who would otherwise start smoking.

WHO reports that a tax increase that increases tobacco prices by 10% decreases tobacco consumption by up to 8% in low- and middle-income countries.

Tobacco use and exposure are a leading public health problem in our country. They are a deterrent to development and worsen poverty. Studies conducted in tobacco-growing areas have reported that a tobacco farmer earns only 33% of the basic household expenditure of an average Ugandan; the farmer suffers cases of green tobacco sickness caused by poisoning from exposure to nicotine absorbed during cultivation and harvesting tobacco; the community is exposed to food insecurity, most of the land is devoted to tobacco farming; and four (4) in every ten (10) boys and six (6) in every ten (10) girls of school-going age are unable to join schools in tobacco-growing areas because they are working in Tobacco FHDs.

To this end the Ministry of Health and all tobacco stakeholders are urged to:

- Provide a tobacco free environment thus ensuring the right to health and public health policies from protecting the young vulnerable people from exposure to nicotine absorbed during tobacco cultivation and harvesting tobacco.
- Offer smoke-free education and promotion in schools.
- Pass the Tobacco Control Bill of 2014. Enforcement measures in this Bill will protect Ugandans from the devastating health, social, economic and environmental consequences of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke by imposing bans on smoking in public places and tobacco advertising, increasing taxes on tobacco products and restricting government agencies with the Tobacco Industry.
- RAISE TOBACCO TAXES TO REDUCE AND CURB TOBACCO CONSUMPTION AMONG YOUTHS IN UGANDA.

Press Statement of the Tobacco Control Forum on World No Tobacco Day 2014

Uganda ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in 2007. As a result of this Convention, roads we are convinced that the Convention was signed as a Global Interventions to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, environmental and social harms caused by tobacco use. Tobacco use is a key risk factor for many diseases such as tuberculosis and worses outcomes in HIV cases because of its ability to lower the immunity.

Tobacco imposes an economic burden on the country not only through increased expenditure to treat the chronic non communicable diseases but is also linked to poverty due to consuming 45% of household expenditure among smokers.

Research indicates that while the tobacco industry markets the inputs for tobacco growing is lucrative, farmers are caught in a debt trap since the tobacco industry has monopolies and determines the grades, the prices and deducts the loans for inputs despite the prices and deducts the loans for inputs despite the interests of the tobacco farmers during his visit to Kiboga District where he encouraged the government to adopt alternative crops to tobacco. Tobacco farmers in that area reported receiving ‘peanuts’ from their labour while the tobacco industry pockets astronomical profits. According to the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development tobacco products contribute 0.8% of the net revenue to the Government of Uganda.