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**Introduction of pictorial health warnings on tobacco packages in Cameroon: a step forward in tobacco control.**

**Statement of Deowan Mohee, Executive Secretary of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA)**

*Lome, 14 June, 2019*

Since June 12, 2019, a major change has been noted at points of sale of tobacco products in Cameroon. New cigarette packs with pictorial health warnings are now available at these tobacco outlets throughout the country. This change follows the decision taken on January 3, 2018 by Cameroonian authorities through an order jointly signed by the Minister of Health and his counterpart at the Ministry of Trade, which requires all packs of tobacco products to carry text warnings in French and English, accompanied by an image illustrating the health effects of tobacco use, all covering 70% of the front and back surfaces.

With the effective implementation of this order after a six-month extension, Cameroon is following the footsteps of other countries in the African region, namely, Chad, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal and Seychelles. The country has taken a big step forward in its ongoing effort to implement the WHO FCTC which it ratified in 2006.

Cameroon, with a population of 24 million, has a huge human potential which, in the absence of a comprehensive tobacco control framework, has long been a victim of the health, economic and environmental consequences of tobacco. Nearly 1.1 million adults, or 8.9% of the population, consume tobacco products with nearly 7 million passive smokers. According to the Ministry of Health, tobacco kills around 3,500 people a year, impacting on the economic development of the country.

The introduction of pictorial health warnings on tobacco packs is one of the provisions of the WHO FCTC aimed at reducing the demand for tobacco. This measure will certainly contribute in raising awareness on the harms of tobacco use in the Cameroonian population and dissuade non-smokers, especially young people, not to take up tobacco use. It will also serve as a lesson to other countries in the region that progress in tobacco control is possible, despite the numerous challenges ahead.

The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) joins the tobacco control community to congratulate the Cameroonian government for taking this bold decision in favour of public health. We urge the government to accelerate the full implementation of the WHO FCTC through the adoption of a strong tobacco control law. We also congratulate civil society and all partners who supported the Cameroonian authorities throughout this process.