



Statement of Leonce SESSOU, Executive Secretary of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) on the Release of the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2021.

Africa must strive to keep low its rate of current and projected sales of new technology tobacco products

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Published on 27 July 2021, [the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2021](#) makes a firm reminder that Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) are addictive and not without harm. It further recommends that ENDS be strictly regulated for maximum protection of public health.

This reminder comes handy, at a time when tobacco multinationals have carefully crafted messages that misleadingly depict new technology tobacco products, including ENDS, as “safer alternatives” to conventional cigarettes.

While many of the long-term health effects of ENDS use are still unknown, there is growing evidence to demonstrate that these products are not harmless. The recently launched report highlights this, and indicates that unfortunately, users perceive them to be significantly “less harmful” than other tobacco products, especially cigarettes.

This once again demonstrates the impact of the malicious tactics engaged by tobacco multinationals to attract as many people as possible to its products. Unfortunately, in Africa, children and adolescents are among the primary target of such deceitful marketing. The report notes that children and adolescents who use ENDS can double their risk of smoking cigarettes as there are approximately 16 000 unique flavours available in some markets, many of them appealing to children.

The report also highlights recent studies suggesting that ENDS have negative acute effects on cardiovascular health, including heart rate and blood pressure. Daily ENDS use has also been shown to be associated with increased risk of myocardial infarction as indicated by the report. Several other health consequences of ENDS like measurable adverse effects on organ and cellular health in humans, in animals, and in vitro, and other conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are highlighted.

Africa still has the lowest rate of current and projected sales of ENDS products. While this may appear to be good news, it emphasizes the need for absolute vigilance and hard work to maintain the status quo as such low levels mean an open and unexploited market for the tobacco industry.

In the WHO Afro region, only 4 countries (Ethiopia, Gambia, Mauritius and Uganda) have some form of regulation on ENDS. As the report highlights, tobacco and ENDS companies use product design features that increase the attractiveness of the products, especially to young users.

Our tobacco control efforts must therefore remain focused on reducing tobacco use and phasing out distractions created by the tobacco industry. Hard-hitting mass media campaigns, which the report notes as effective and essential for the fight, must be intensified. To maximise resources and stand a better chance of succeeding, the media should be associated to combined efforts of government and civil society to deal with all instances of tobacco industry interference.

Collectively, success is assured.

**Media contact:** AYONG I. CALEB

Email: [ayong@atca-africa.org](mailto:ayong@atca-africa.org)

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*The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) is a non-profit, non-political Pan-African network of civil society organizations headquartered in Lome, Togo. With membership in 39 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and preventing the tobacco epidemic in the continent.*