

## **WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2024**

### **Statement of Leonce Dieudonne SESSOU, Executive Secretary of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA)**

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*For immediate release*

**Lomé, May 31, 2024** - Every year, on May 31, the global community comes together to highlight the dangers of tobacco and the measures needed to protect our communities from this scourge that devastates our population, especially our youth. With great conviction, we celebrate this year's World No Tobacco Day under the theme: "Protecting Children from Tobacco Industry Interference."

Today, more than ever, we must face a pressing challenge: protecting our children and adolescents from the dangers of tobacco and the insidious tactics of tobacco companies seeking to lure them in. Children are our future, and it is our responsibility to shield them from any influence that would jeopardize their health and well-being.

The statistics are alarming. Globally, it is estimated that 37 million children aged 13 to 15 use tobacco. In many countries, the rate of e-cigarette use among adolescents even exceeds that of adults. Every day worldwide, between 80,000 and 100,000 young people become addicted to tobacco. If current trends continue, 250 million children alive today will eventually die from tobacco-related diseases.

Tobacco companies, in their insidious tactics, introduce products with enticing flavors, such as candy and fruit, to attract young minds. These practices show a blatant disregard for the health and future of our children. It is unacceptable that these companies continue to endanger young lives for their own profit.

We must be vigilant and uncompromising in implementing the measures taken to regulate tobacco use. These include:

- Prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to minors and sale of single sticks,
- Banning tobacco advertisements on all platforms, particularly social media and entertainment media,
- Prohibiting tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship around schools and all places frequented by children,
- Increasing taxes on tobacco products in a way to contribute to higher prices and limit access.

It is crucial that we continue to raise awareness, educate, and mobilize our community to protect our youth. Our actions must focus on:

- Strengthening our education efforts to inform and sensitize children and young people about the dangers of tobacco. School programs, media campaigns, and initiatives at community level must be at the heart of our actions. It is important that children understand that tobacco products are harmful and that tobacco company marketing strategies are designed to manipulate them.
- Encouraging parents to openly discuss the dangers of tobacco with their children and monitor the influences they are exposed to.
- Urging community and religious leaders to organize support and awareness programs to strengthen young people's resilience against the pressures of the tobacco industry.

Our commitment must be total and unwavering. Uniting and using all available resources to counter the interference of the tobacco industry will be our guiding principle to protect our children.

On this World No Tobacco Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to creating a world where our children can grow up healthy, free from the destructive influence of the tobacco industry. Together, we can make a difference. Together, let us protect our children, let us protect our future.

*For media inquiries, please contact:*

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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 members in 39 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and curbing the tobacco epidemic in the continent. The alliance is an Observer to the WHO FCTC Conference of Parties and Meeting of Parties to the protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products. It has a Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC, and is accredited as a regional non-state actor (NSA) with WHO AFRO.*