



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Beirut, Friday, May 31, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Championing Youth Protection: AUB Marks World No Tobacco Day 2024

In observance of World No Tobacco Day, under this year's theme of "Protecting Children from Tobacco Industry Interference," an event held at the American University of Beirut (AUB) discussed the damaging effects of tobacco use and nicotine products on the health of individuals and the wellbeing of communities, particularly the youth. The May 31, 2024 event was hosted by the WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub on Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking at AUB, the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC), and the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI). The symposium aimed at underscoring the urgent need to formulate strategies to combat the epidemic of tobacco and nicotine use among young individuals in Lebanon.

Distinguished experts in the field convened at the Charles Hostler Auditorium at AUB for panel discussions and deliberations, led by Dr. Imad Bou Hamad, associate professor at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business. The event witnessed the participation of public health and education leaders including the WHO Lebanon Office, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Parliamentary Health Committee, Members of Parliament, and, from AUBMC, the Health and Wellness Center-Smoking Cessation Program and Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute. Their collective efforts aimed at raising awareness about the grave public health implications of tobacco use, which claims the lives of 8 million people worldwide each year.

Highlighting the uncontrolled use of vaping products, such as e-cigarettes, and flavored waterpipes in Lebanon, and shedding light on the insidious tactics employed by the tobacco industry to entice children and youth into using their lethal products, the symposium speakers underscored the urgent need to address the industry's predatory practices. With a relentless focus on introducing new tobacco and nicotine products that are aesthetically appealing and falsely marketed as harmless or even beneficial for smoking cessation, the industry capitalizes on regulatory loopholes to promote and advertise these items. Against this background, speakers urged that all necessary measures be taken by the government and policymakers in Lebanon to ensure the wellbeing of children and youth across the nation.

The primary objectives of this year's observance were clear and resolute as several speakers emphasized the importance of forcibly implementing Lebanon's Law 174 on tobacco control, prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to minors at all points of sale. Additionally, advertisement and promotion of all tobacco products, including on social media platforms and audiovisual networks, should be banned. Furthermore, the prohibition of sales through social media platforms



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and the cessation of tobacco industry sponsorship of social events and activities are critical steps towards shielding our youth from the harmful influences of the tobacco industry. Lastly, education remains paramount in this fight against tobacco, as we must strive to enlighten the public, public health workers, and educators about the grave health risks associated with tobacco products, both for users and bystanders alike.

Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, director of WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking emphasized, “The theme of this year’s World No Tobacco Day carries a very critical and urgent call to all policy makers and stakeholders to implement prompt and tough measures to counter the aggressive promotion, marketing, and sale of tobacco and nicotine products to children and youth. The tobacco industry is well known for its deceitful tactics and manipulative claims and its relentless efforts to victimize children and young people by turning them into lifelong nicotine addicts thus enriching its coffers. Watching this without firm action is unethical and constitutes a crime against the future generations.”

In recognition of its expertise, AUB was designated in 2016 as the global Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking (KH-WTS) by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Moreover, AUB proudly became the first university in Lebanon and the region to declare its campus tobacco free, underscoring its commitment to advocacy for stringent tobacco control measures in the nation. By uniting policymakers, health professionals, and community leaders on the AUB campus, the university reaffirms its position as a staunch champion of public health and reiterates its commitment to working towards a tobacco-free future for generations to come.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 800 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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