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Note for the press N°14  
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## **EUROPEAN HEALTH COMMISSIONER BYRNE HONORED FOR OUTSTANDING TOBACCO CONTROL WORK**

Mr David Byrne, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, today received the World Health Organization Director-General's Award for leadership in global tobacco control.

"WHO is very pleased to honor Commissioner Byrne today for his courage and relentless tobacco control work," said Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General, WHO. "We salute him for his tremendous contribution towards European and global tobacco control. Mr Byrne has played a leading role in supporting the establishment of an effective and comprehensive WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control," added Dr Brundtland.

Negotiated under the auspices of WHO, the pioneering Convention aims to protect health and save the lives of billions in present and future generations. This will be achieved through tobacco advertising bans, larger health warning labels on tobacco products, measures to protect against secondhand smoke, tobacco tax and price increases and efforts to eliminate illicit trade. The FCTC is the first international, legal instrument designed to counter the harmful effects of tobacco consumption.

Tobacco control has been both a personal and political priority for Commissioner Byrne. He believes that "it's high time we put an end to this needless waste that claims the lives of eight people every minute around the world."

Mr Byrne has been a major driving force behind tough, recent European tobacco control legislation, such as directives banning tobacco advertising and regulating tobacco products, in keeping with the Framework Convention. The maximum tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide content for cigarettes will be restricted starting January 2004. Health warnings will cover at least one-third of the cigarette pack and misleading descriptors, such as "light" or "mild", will be prohibited.

Well aware that the tobacco industry needs to find replacements for its "disposable consumers", Commissioner Byrne initiated a pan-European information campaign to prevent smoking among children and adolescents whose slogan is "Feel free to say no." He has also worked on limiting access of young people to tobacco products, as no country in the European region has shown a significant decrease in smoking by young people since 1997.

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Moreover, Mr Byrne has focused attention on the dangers of passive smoking taking on those who see it as a non-issue and declaring that "our medical faculties are piled high with studies estimating that passive smoking accounts for between 30 000 and 50 000 deaths every year in the European Union."

Commissioner Byrne has also encouraged European Union Member States to support tough tobacco control measures: "How is it possible that Governments whose first duty is the protection of their citizens well-being, will block and obstruct and even litigate, rather than put their citizens' health first?", he asked last year in a pivotal speech in Warsaw.

Today, Commissioner Byrne and Dr Costas Stefanis, Minister of Health and Welfare, Greece, signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on behalf of the European Community, making the regional economic integration organization one of the treaty's first signatories.

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David Byrne was appointed in 1999 as Europe's first Health Commissioner. He has particular responsibility for food safety, public health and consumer protection. From 1997 to 1999, Mr Byrne was Attorney General in the Irish Government. During this period, he set up the first independent Food Safety Agency in Europe with responsibility to the Ministry of Health, and was one of the negotiators of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, later overseeing constitutional amendments related to the Agreement. A barrister, Commissioner Byrne holds degrees in law and economics, ethics and politics. More biographical details about Commissioner Byrne are available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/byrne/cv\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/byrne/cv_en.htm).

A photograph of Commissioner Byrne receiving the World Health Organization Director-General's Award for leadership in global tobacco control will be available at: <http://www.who.int/multimedia/fctc/signing/photo.html>.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is available in six languages at: <http://tobacco.who.int/page.cfm?sid=96>.

All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page <http://www.who.ch>.