

**Pre-recorded opening remarks by Dr Gauden Galea at the: World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) 2023 Award Ceremony organized as part of the Slovenian National Symposium on WNTD 2023 "For a Tobacco and Nicotine-Free Slovenia 2040"**

**Ljubljana, Slovenia, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

***Shown at the Opening part of the WMTD 2023 Award Ceremony***

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Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure and honor to address you today. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the remarkable individuals and organizations who have been bestowed with the prestigious World No Tobacco Day Award. This recognition is a testament to your unwavering commitment and outstanding contributions to the global fight against tobacco use.

As we approach the World No Tobacco Day, we are reminded of the urgent need to address the grave and avoidable health, social, economic and environmental burden posed by tobacco. Tobacco use continues to claim millions of lives each year, wreaking havoc on families, communities, and societies worldwide. The awardees we honor today have dedicated their professional lives to combating this global epidemic, striving tirelessly towards a tobacco-free world.

Your achievements serve as a shining example of what can be accomplished when passion, innovation, and determination converge in the pursuit of a common goal. Through your relentless advocacy, you have raised awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco, you've supported the implementation of evidence-based policies, and pioneered groundbreaking initiatives that have saved lives and transformed communities.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." You have embodied this principle, becoming catalysts for change and driving transformation at local, national, and global levels. Your accomplishments remind us that even in the face of formidable challenges, progress is possible, and change can be achieved.

There is no doubt that individuals like you can make a difference, but just imagine what progress can be achieved when we work together towards a common goal. As you have gathered today in beautiful Slovenia, a country that has embraced a progressive stance on tobacco control, let's recognize the importance of collaboration and international cooperation in addressing the global tobacco epidemic.

Helen Keller, an American author and disability rights advocate, beautifully captured the essence of this power of partnerships in her statement – "Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much". May this be a guiding principle for this conference and all our tobacco control work.

On this auspicious occasion, let us all once again express our deepest appreciation and gratitude to the 2023 World No Tobacco Day awardees:

- Ms Suzanne Gabriels from the Fondation Contre le Cancer, Belgium

- Professor Panagiotis Behrakis from the Smoke Free Greece
- Dr Jamilya Sadykova from the National coalition "For smokefree Kazakhstan"
- Dr Reinskje Talhout from the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Netherlands, and
- National Institute of Public Health and its Anti-Tobacco Working Group from Slovenia

May your achievements serve as an inspiration to us all, motivating us to redouble our efforts and work together toward a future where diseases caused by tobacco use are but a distant memory.

Thank you for your remarkable contributions in advancing the cause of tobacco control!