

## UN urges action to curb harmful use of alcohol, reduce deaths

Contributed by Administrator  
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Geneva, Switzerland, 14 February 2011—The harmful consumption of alcohol kills an estimated 2.5 million people across the world every year, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a report governments to implement measures to prevent drinking habits that damage health and cause other social problems.

According to the Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, harmful alcohol use is increasingly affecting the younger generations and drinkers in the developing countries, the UN News Centre reported.

'Many countries recognize the serious public health problems caused by the harmful use of alcohol and have taken steps to prevent the health and social burdens and treat those in need of care,' said Ala Alwan, the WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

'But clearly much more needs to be done to reduce the loss of life and suffering associated with harmful alcohol use,' he added.

According to the report, nearly 4 per cent of all deaths globally are related to alcohol, and most alcohol-related deaths result from injuries, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and liver cirrhosis. Globally, 6.2 per cent of all male deaths are related to alcohol, compared to 1.1 per cent of female deaths, the report notes.

One in five men in Russia and neighbouring countries die of alcohol-related causes, according to data in the report, while globally, 320,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 die annually from alcohol-related causes, which represent 9 per cent of all deaths in that age group.

Too few countries use effective policy options to prevent death, disease and injury from alcohol use, WHO notes in its report.

The agency points out that from 1999, when it first began to report on alcohol policies, at least 34 countries have adopted some type of formal policies to reduce harmful use of alcohol.

Restrictions on alcohol marketing and on drinking and driving have increased, but there are no clear trends on most preventive measures. Many countries have weak alcohol policies and prevention programmes, WHO adds.

It recalls that the global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, endorsed by WHO member States in May 2010,

promotes a range of proven effective measures for reducing alcohol-related harm.

The measures include taxation on alcohol to reduce harmful drinking, decreasing availability by reducing outlets licensed to sell alcohol, raising age limits for those buying and using alcohol, and enforcing effective measures to prevent driving under the influence of alcohol.

Worldwide consumption in 2005 was equal to 6.13 litres of pure alcohol consumed per person aged 15 years or older, according to the report.

Analysis from 2001-2005 showed countries in the Americas, European, Eastern Mediterranean and Western Pacific regions had relatively stable consumption levels during that time.

Increased consumption was observed in Africa and South-East Asia during the five-year period.

WHO also notes that despite widespread consumption, most people do not drink. Almost half of all men and two-thirds of women did not consume alcohol in 2005, according to the latest information in the report.

Abstention rates are low in high-income, high-consumption countries, and higher in North African and South Asian countries. But those who do drink in countries with high abstention rates consume alcohol at high levels.

The launch of the report coincided with the end of a four-day meeting of officials from over 100 countries working with WHO to reduce harmful use of alcohol worldwide. This first such meeting, hosted by WHO in Geneva, was held to initiate implementation of the Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol.....PNS (ENDS)