

## STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

### HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF NCDs 73<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Conference Room 4

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*Issued by Irene Khan, Director-General, IDLO*

*Madam President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

When we think of non-communicable diseases, law is not necessarily the first thing that jumps to mind.

That is understandable.

For many years, diseases like cancer, asthma, diabetes and heart disease were viewed only through the lens of public health.

Now that there is more data, research and information on NCDs, they are being rightly seen as a multi-dimensional challenge that requires a multi-dimensional response.

The rule of law is a crucial part of that response.

We only have to look at the actions recommended by the World Health Organization. Most of them require legal reform of some kind, whether it is about stemming the illicit trade of tobacco products or establishing minimum prices for alcohol.

If we want to turn these best practices into *common* practices, we need the rule of law.

The rule of law supports regulation, but it also goes beyond that to include the empowerment of people and protection of their rights.

Parents who can, thanks to clear product labeling, decide which food will be better for their families. Local leaders who can, thanks to partnerships with trained legal activists, mobilize their communities to support government initiatives to fight NCDs. People who can, thanks to bans on indoor smoking, choose to avoid places where they would be exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke.

These are people who are informed. These are people who are empowered. They can make well-informed, evidence-based choices. The right to information – an element of the rule of law – is crucial to any strategy to address NCDs.

The law protects those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or discriminated against.

Children, for example. When it comes to the marketing of food and non-alcoholic

beverages, children deserve special protection. And the law can provide it.

Women are another example. NCDs affect women and men differently. Inherent gender bias within many health systems can obstruct the equitable access of women and girls to prevention and treatment services. Broader gender-based inequalities - from education to income and employment - can also limit the ability of women and girls to protect their health.

The rule of law can balance this imbalance, in a direct way, for example through legislation that prohibits discrimination in health care, but also more broadly, for example through legal action against sexual harassment and gender-based violence so that women and girls can have safer access to recreational facilities.

The Sustainable Development Goals are inter-dependent. Exploiting that inter-dependence is key to the fight against NCDs.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 on the rule of law can propel us faster towards achieving Goal 3 on health. It can enhance our efforts to achieve other goals - whether SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 2 on nutrition or SDG 5 on gender equality - which, in turn, can give us a better shot at winning the fight against NCDs.

As the world's only inter-governmental organization exclusively devoted to the rule of law, IDLO is ready to do its part in the fight against NCDs.

We are rolling out an initiative in collaboration with WHO and Canada's International Development Research Agency, and with support from Switzerland and the OPEC Fund for International Development.

This three-year program will see us working closely with a number of governments to build their legal capacity to develop and implement successful policies to fight NCDs. It will also involve partnerships with civil society to create greater awareness and garner public support for legal measures to address the challenge of NCDs.

The demand for legal capacity at the national level is enormous. The resources are limited. There is an urgent need for the international community to step up its efforts to fill the unmet needs for legal capacity and technical assistance on NCDs.

Too many lives are being lost in their prime to NCDs.

Now is the time to start joining the dots. Now is the time to break down the silos.

Now is the time to build bigger, bolder partnerships.

Thank you.

*The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.*